6522

Barbarossa

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INTRODUCTION

The largest invasion in history began on 22 June 1941 when German and Axis allied armies marched into the USSR. What was supposed to be a relatively easy ten-week campaign to give the Third Reich the continental resource base with which to fight the Anglo-American maritime powers, ended in disaster for Germany. Before the Wehrmacht stalled before Moscow, Hitler's army would achieve nearly five months of fantastic victories. The Soviet Union had a vote, however, and would hound the Germans every step of the way.

Planning for Barbarossa began little more than a month after the fall of France. On 31 July 1940 Hitler assembled his top military leaders at his mountain retreat in Berchestesgaden and clarified his intention to invade the USSR. Stalin found out about this meeting from his spies within days. German planning divided into two efforts, one by the OKW (Military High Command) and another by the OKH (Army High Command). The Army option developed by Maj. Gen. Erich Marcks eventually won out and operations were largely based on his vision. He foresaw panzer spearheads thrusting deep into the Soviet Union to create encirclement battles followed by the bulk of the army marching on foot.

Army staff fleshed in details to complete the plan. The Germans defined success as destroying the Red Army west of a line marked by the Dvina and Dnepr Rivers. They assumed that if they met this criterion, the rest of the USSR would be mopped up in basically an exploitation operation. Hitler would then plunder any and all Russian resources for German use and his intended offensive against the UK and USA. In November 1940, two events occurred to seal Barbarossa's fate. First, Franklin D. Roosevelt won election to his third term as US president, meaning the USA would not be neutral much longer. The other event was the visit to Berlin of the Soviet Foreign Minister in a last-ditch effort to resuscitate cooperative Nazi-Soviet relations that followed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Hitler could not divert the Soviets toward the south and east.

German generals briefed Hitler on the final plan for Barbarossa and received his approval on 5 December. At that point the Führer made a critical point that he would repeat again and again for the next year (and beyond): destroying the Red Army and occupying resource areas was more important than capturing Moscow. He issued his final directive #21 for the operation on 18 December. For the next six months, the Germans perfected their plans, transferred units to the east and made logistical preparations. The generally agreed upon start date for Barbarossa was mid-May, 1941. Delays in transferring formation and setting up their logistics conspired with heavy rains and rivers in flood that spring pushed back D-Day. There is no proof that the Nazi invasion of the Balkans in April, 1941, caused the postponement of Barbarossa.

The Soviets had not been idle during this period. By December 1940 and January 1941 the Red Army conducted wargames testing their defensive plans and arrangements. It was here that Gen. G.K. Zhukov impressed Stalin to the point that the dictator appointed him chief of staff of the Red Army five months prior to Barbarossa. Saddled with 1) an unrealistic Soviet doctrine requiring the Red Army immediately attack into Germany if invaded, 2) exposed positions resulting from Stalin's 1939-40 land grabs, 3) a Red Army expanding in size too quickly, 4) devastating purges of senior leadership perpetrated by the paranoid dictator, 5) confused mechanized doctrine and other constrains, Zhukov tried to prepare for the attack nearly everyone in the USSR knew would soon come. The main person who would not, or could not, see the impending invasion was the only one who mattered: Stalin.

Hitler achieved complete strategic, operational and tactical surprise on 22 June. His eastern armies were organized into three massive army groups: North aiming at Leningrad; South making for the Ukraine and Center—the main effort—heading down the traditional invasion route to Moscow. Panzer forces were arranged in four groups, one each in the north and south, with two in the center. Zhukov later wrote that no one in the Soviet high command believed the Wehrmacht could attack in strength, on every main axis all at once. Everywhere along the front the Germans ripped huge gaps in the Red defenses and poured into the enemy rear. Many Soviet commanders kept their wits and maintained a semi-coherent defense but by and large the majority did not. Wehrmacht leaders outclassed their Red Army opponents at every level. Massive and theoretically deadly Soviet mechanized corps were in fact too widely dispersed so made ineffectual, piecemeal counterattacks. Drivers of individual vehicles and tanks were so inexperienced they either drove their weapons into marshes or until they ran out of fuel.

Within days of the invasion Army Group North's panzer had crossed the Dvina River in a daring *coup de main* and were plunging into the Baltic countries and Leningrad's approaches. Soviet leadership in this theater was especially poor as entire armies retreated in any direction, opening great holes for the panzer to exploit and even jeopardizing defenders along the central front. Axis ally Finland launched its own invasion later in June in an effort to regain territory lost during the Winter War. The Finns easily and quickly crossed the old 1940 frontier but for strategic reasons halted well-distant from Leningrad, leaving that metropolis with a considerable hinterland that would be indispensable during the 900-day siege that was to follow.

Between the Rokitino Marshes and the Black Sea, Army Group South made initially unspectacular advances against the Soviet's defensive main effort. Competent Red Army leadership, their skillful use of antitank brigades, and the Nazi version of coalition warfare (Romania, Italy, Hungary and Slovakia were involved here) hamstrung the Wehrmacht. As in the north, the Germans employed only one panzer group in the southern theater. While they proved capable of penetrating Soviet lines and driving into the rear areas, envelopment maneuvers were difficult. However, within two weeks the frontier battles here had run their course as well. Again Red mechanized corps had failed to live up to expectation; they were simply too big and too spread out for their inexperienced and overmatched commanders. In contrast to the other theaters, the Soviet Southern Front commander managed to maintain a coherent defense as he pulled back.

This was not the case in the center. Here, positions in the exposed Bialystock salient and weak Soviet generalship proved to be an unworthy opponent to the Nazi main effort. Running generally parallel to the relatively high ground between Warsaw and Moscow, Army Group Center's two panzer groups created a string of three double encirclements in one month: Bialystock (closed 28 June), Minsk (27 June), and Smolensk (mid-July). In each pocket hundreds of thousands of Soviet soldiers surrendered and hundreds or thousands of tanks and artillery pieces were either destroyed or captured. Within hours of the German invasion the Red Army Air Force commander committed suicide over the destruction of his "combat ready" organization. Within days Stalin arrested the Western Front commander for dereliction and after a show trial had him executed as a warning to other Soviet leaders. Meanwhile overhead, in a well-known episode, the Luftwaffe decimated Soviet aircraft in the air and on the ground.

All did not go perfectly for the Germans, however. One telling statistic: They lost more aircraft on Barbarossa's first day than on the worst day during the Battle of Britain. As soon as they crossed the frontier the Germans were slowed by sandy roads, muddy roads or no roads at all. Fuel consumption rates, ammunition usage rates, vehicle breakdown and repair rates were at least three times pre-war estimates. The Soviets launched counterattacks whenever possible, even by the smallest units, creating a "death by a thousand cuts" syndrome. Worst of all from the German point of view were personnel losses. During Barbarossa casualties equaled one regiment destroyed each day for the entire campaign.

Soviet operational-level offensives are usually associated with the battle for Smolensk. Stalin wanted to blunt the drive on Moscow in addition to helping some of the 300,000 soldiers escape the Nazi encirclement. His attacks caused the Germans some alarm for a couple of days and demonstrated the Red Army would continue to fight no matter what, but created no real problems for the invaders. Zhukov launched numerous attacks against the exposed tip of the Army Group Center spearhead at Yelnia. When the Germans eventually evacuated this salient in early September it represented the first operational withdrawal of German forces in World War Two.

The period of these Soviet counteroffensives, approximately mid-July thru mid-August, coincides with a strategic crisis in the German High Command. First, many generals did not accept Hitler's emphasis on destroying the Red Army and taking Russian resource areas over capturing Moscow. Next, all of Barbarossa's planning assumed the Soviet military would be destroyed west of the Dvina-Dnepr line. Sure enough, the pre-war Red Army had by most accounts had been destroyed at that point, but the Germans had not counted on the ability of the Communist state to regenerate its massive losses. Last, now that the Germans had hit the "what next" stage of the campaign, they had to decide what to do since obviously the USSR was not going to be crushed in ten weeks. Hitler entered into a time-consuming, morale-breaking and momentum-wrecking power struggle with his generals. He issued a confusing and often contradictory series of directives, supplements and thought papers. The main issue centered on the decision whether to secure the flanks and capture Leningrad and the Ukraine first or to continue towards Moscow. Hitler resolved this dilemma only in the third week of August.

Eventually Army Group Center lost a panzer corps to the effort against Leningrad. Terrain, limited Finnish objectives and conservative German leadership condemned Axis fortunes here to a loose and costly siege of the USSR's second city. Likewise, operations near the Arctic Circle proved inconclusive. But sending a panzer group and an infantry army to assist Army Group South represented the main change in plans late that summer. South had just completed its first encirclement battle at Uman and now stood on the middle Dnepr. Reinforced by Center it was finally able to complete a truly massive pocket east of Kiev on 15 September. Two-thirds of a million Red Army soldiers marched into captivity in a trap the size of Belgium. The Wehrmacht outnumbered Soviet forces in the field for the first and only time during the Second World War. In a little over two weeks most of these panzer forces had reoriented on Moscow.

Operation Typhoon, the "final" assault on Moscow, began between 30 September and 2 October with three infantry armies and three panzer groups. As usual, Stalin grossly underestimated the speed and violence of the blitzkrieg. Within three weeks he'd lost another two-thirds of a million men in the double encirclement battles of Viazma and Bryansk. Coupled with additional pockets created simultaneously by Army Group South, the Soviets had lost another entire strategic echelon of their defense. It looked like nothing would keep Hitler out of Stalin's capital. Panic set in among the bureaucrats and population of Moscow, but Stalin personally resolved to stay and that was that. He recalled Zhukov from Leningrad (where he had recently stabilized the defense) and gave him total control of the defense of Moscow.

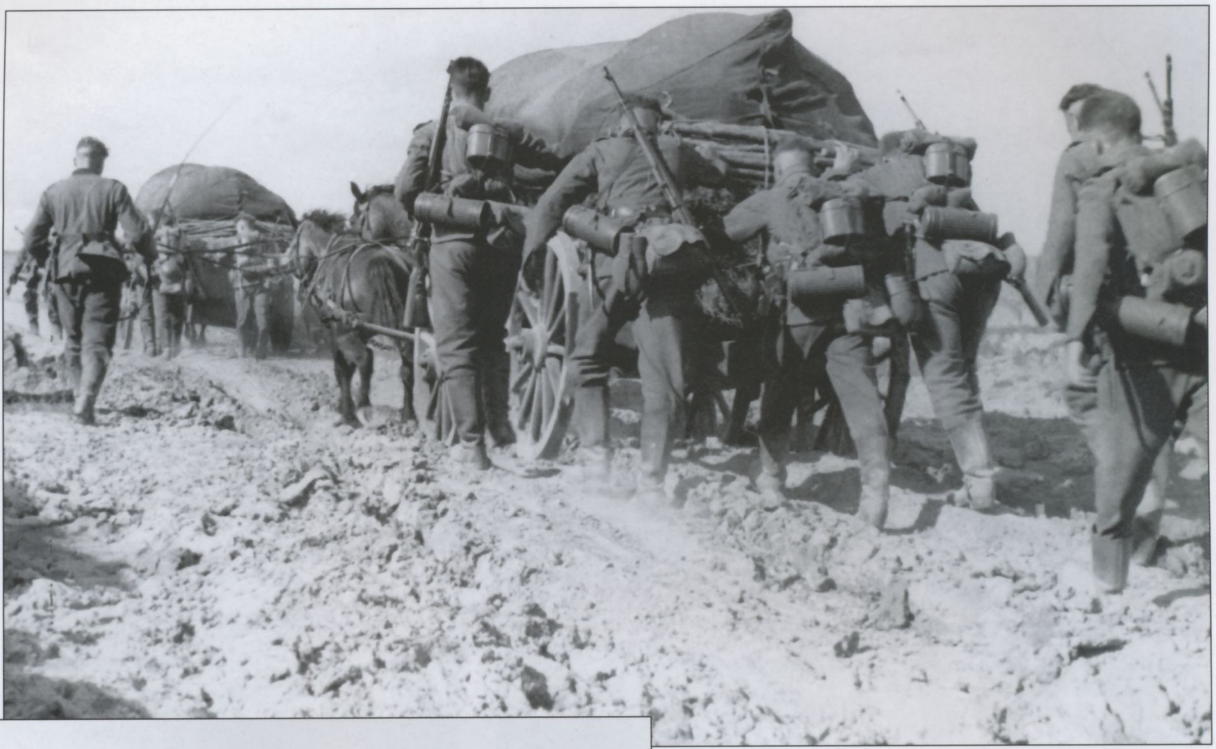
The Germans, no longer capable of sustained operations, had to pause yet again to bring logistic support forward, repair vehicles, etc. About this time, during the second half of October, the autumn rains came and turned the Russian roads to a morass, which many Germans use as a disingenuous excuse for their failure to take Moscow a few weeks later. By early November temperatures dropped enough to freeze the mud and restore some German mobility, albeit at the cost of very cold soldiers. Again the panzer groups led the way, followed as always, by the foot-slogging, long-suffering infantry. The remnants of two panzer groups attacked north of the city along with one to the south. The Germans attacked sequentially, allowing Zhukov to shift newly arriving reserves between threatened sectors in turn.

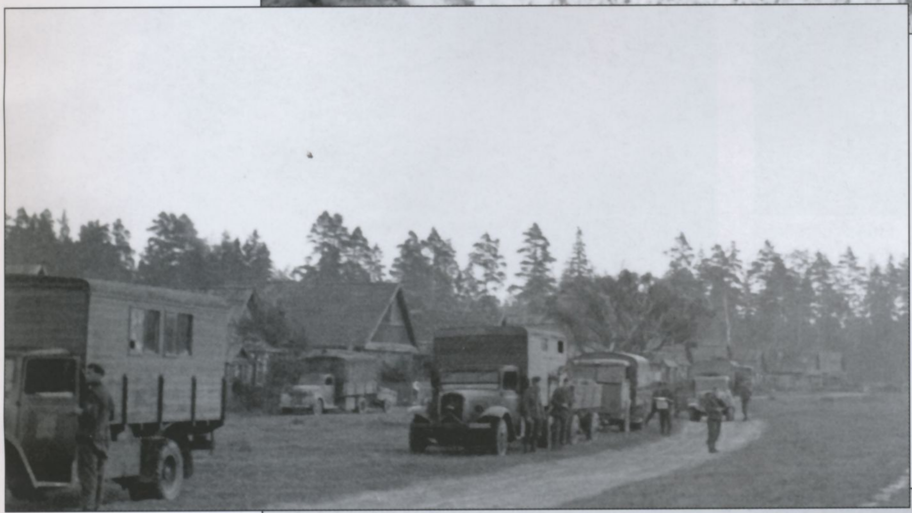
The German generals had wanted Moscow all along and now they had their chance. The commander of their main effort, Field Marshal Hans von Kluge, dragged his feet and under a number of pretexts would not attack. By the end of the month the German Army was in its well-known *Flucht nach Vorne* (flight toward the front) simply to find shelter from the Russian winter (which statistically was not colder than usual, as many Germans claim). German panzer were successful especially in the north where they crossed the Moscow-Volga canal and came to within a dozen miles of the Kremlin. Finally von Kluge bestirred himself but it was too late. Stalin had been husbanding the USSR's great manpower reserves and counterattacked all along the front, first at Rostov in the south, then at Volkhov near Leningrad and finally at Moscow itself. In each case his soldiers sent the Germans reeling westward.

In order for the Germans to have succeeded with Barbarossa they needed an absolutely flawless campaign. Despite fantastic gains on the ground, awesome performances of marching and fighting and a series of incredible, massive victories, they could not defeat the world's largest country and army. Soviet soldiers, airmen, sailors, partisans and workers dogged the invader every step, making tremendous sacrifices. Stalin never gave up and no alternative to his Communist state ever presented itself. When the war in Russia transformed from one of maneuver to one of attrition, it became a war Germany could no longer win.

On the Road during Barbarossa

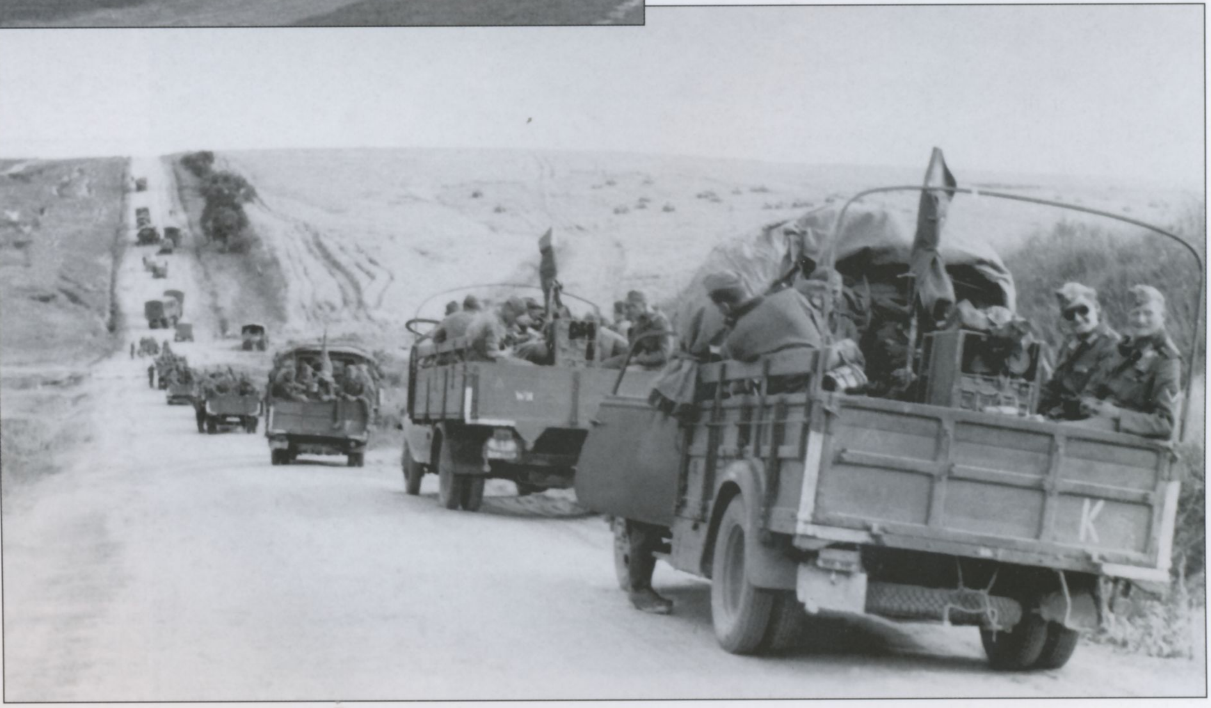
German soldiers help horse teams move wagons over atrocious Russian roads. These roads were often in one of three conditions, none good for mobility: wet and glue-like loamy mud, dusty sand or, as shown here, dried mud as hard as concrete with ruts and clods that ruined wagon undercarriages and strained the legs of man and beast.

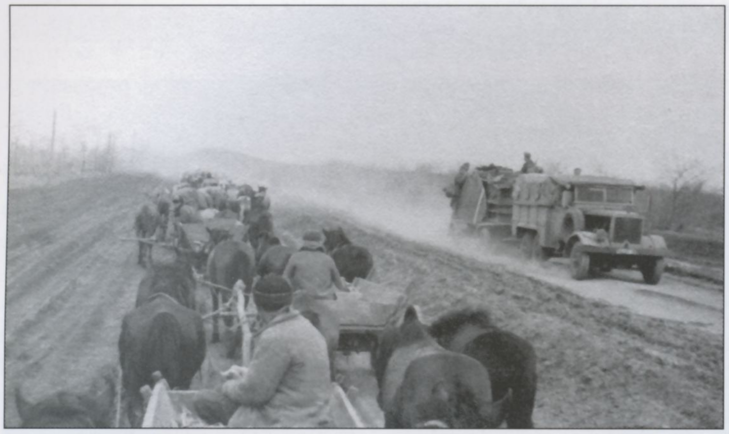




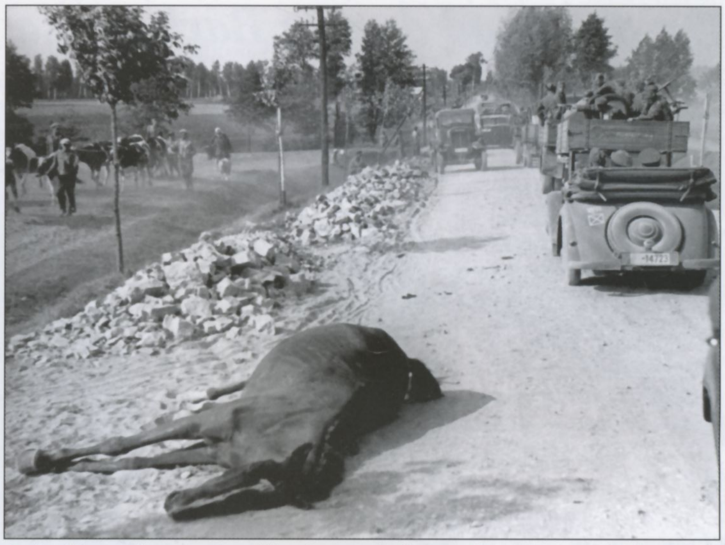
Sometimes, Russian roads were actually roads. Here a convoy of mixed vehicles pauses along side a fairly decent road. Many trucks have wooden structures built up on their cargo beds, often covered with canvas to make them weather tight. Wide variety of vehicle types made for a maintenance and repair parts nightmare.

These soldiers are lucky: they get to ride and the road is in good condition. Gently rolling landscape, however, is still fairly featureless. Most of these trucks have pedestal-mounted machine guns for anti-aircraft protection. The white "K" identifies this column as belonging to Army Group South's First Panzer Group under von Kleist, while the white "L" shapes are to make it easier to see the vehicle at night.

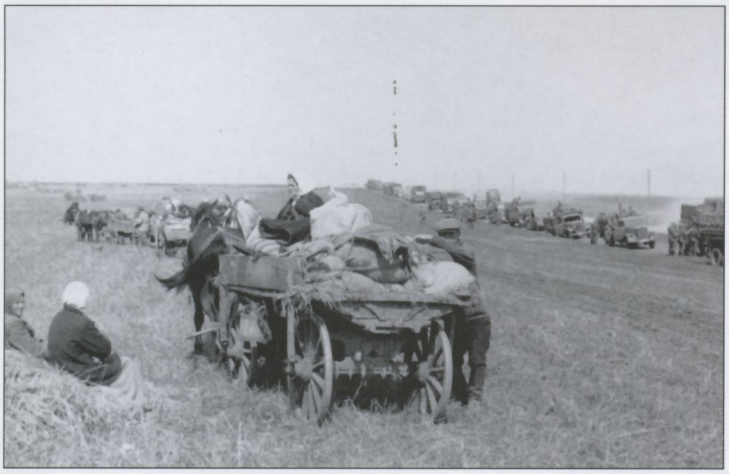




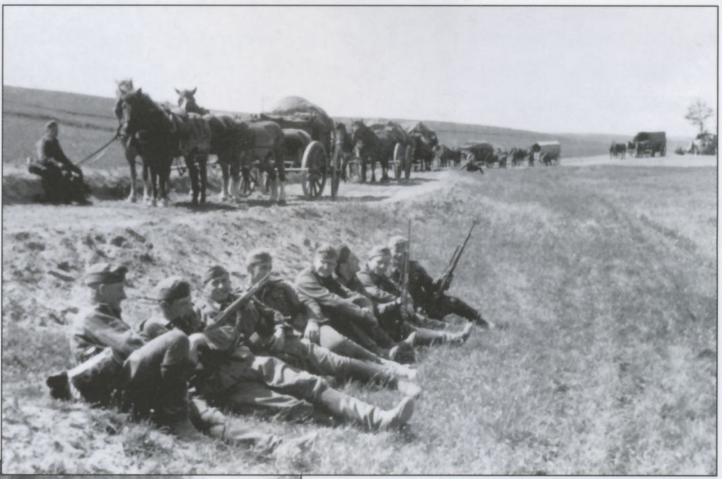
A large Magirus M30 truck with Gypsy-looking trailer heading in one direction (probably toward the front), while a civilian caravan goes in the opposite direction (probably away from the front).



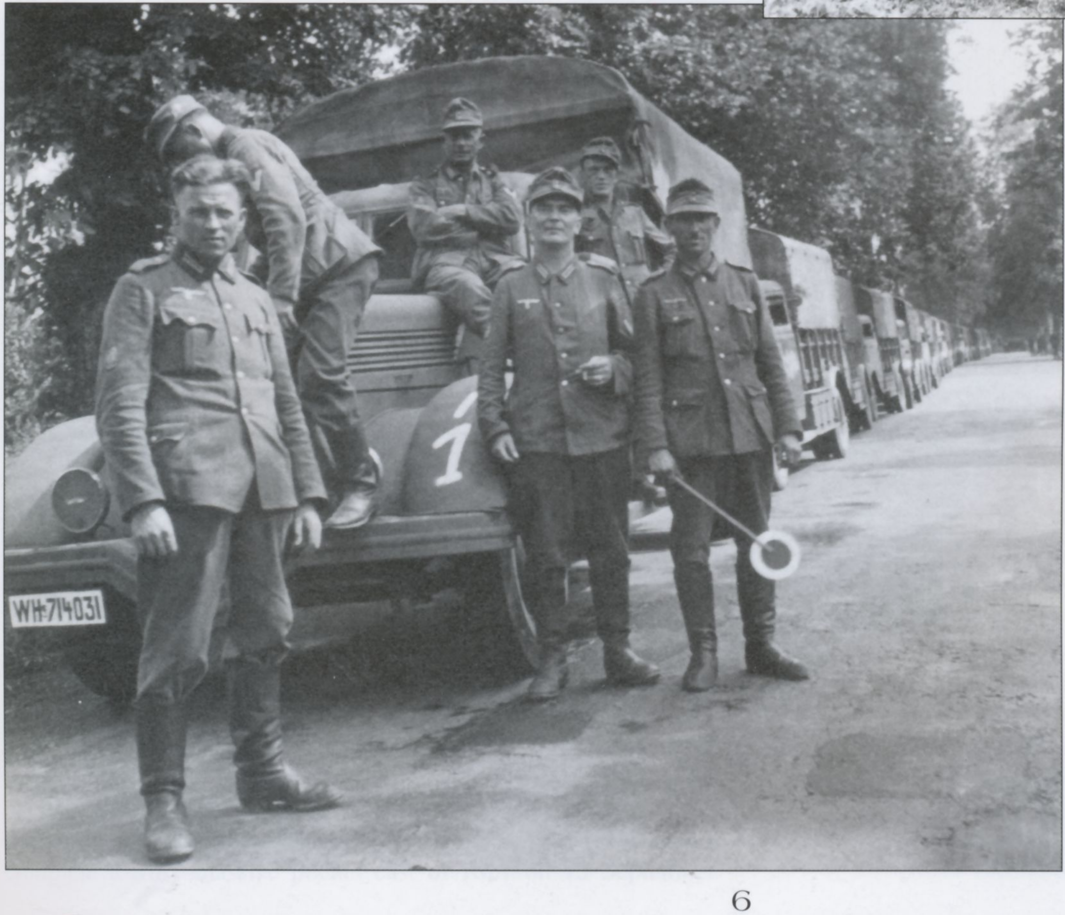
A dead horse lays on the side of a road where exhaustion or gun fire left it. The Germans on the right are heading toward the fighting while civilians on the left are fleeing.



All the elements we've seen before: endless expanse of Russia, mixed German convoy marching to the sound of the guns while a refugee caravan seeks safety.

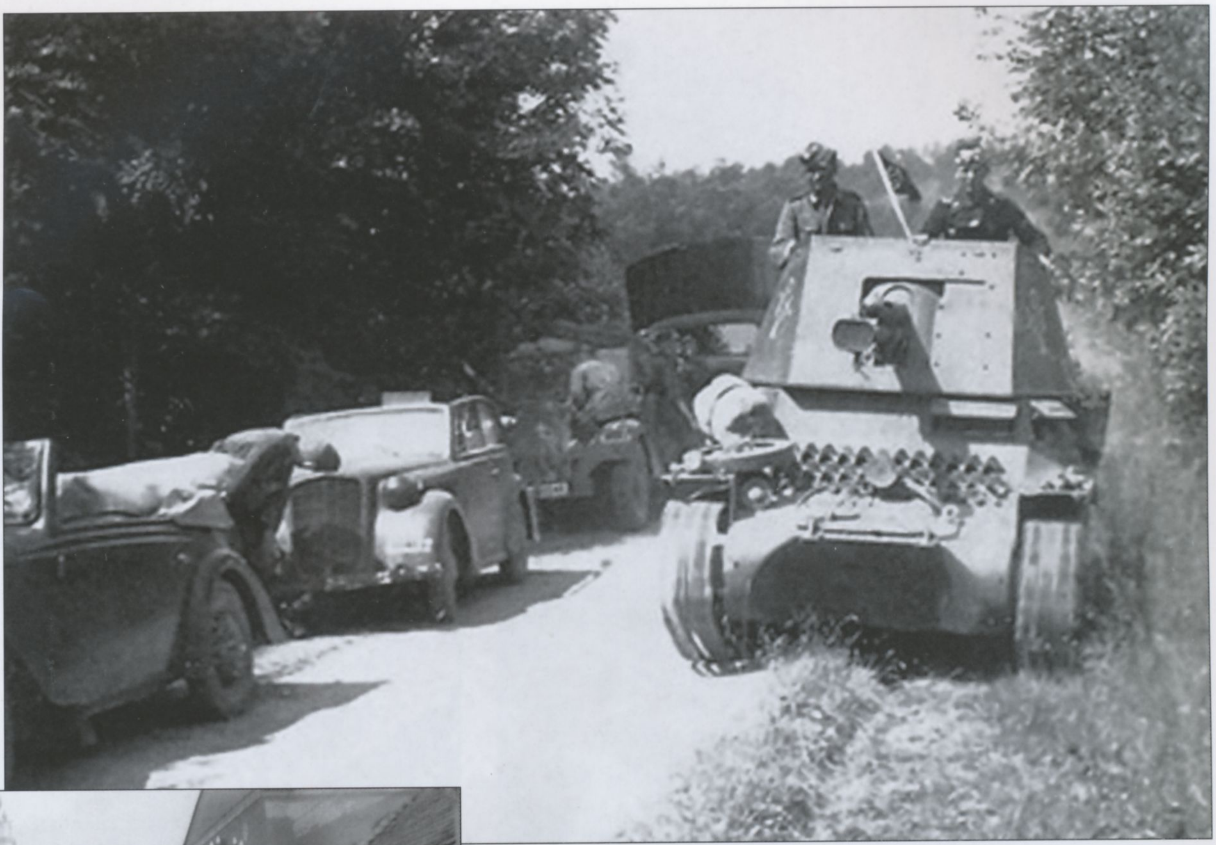


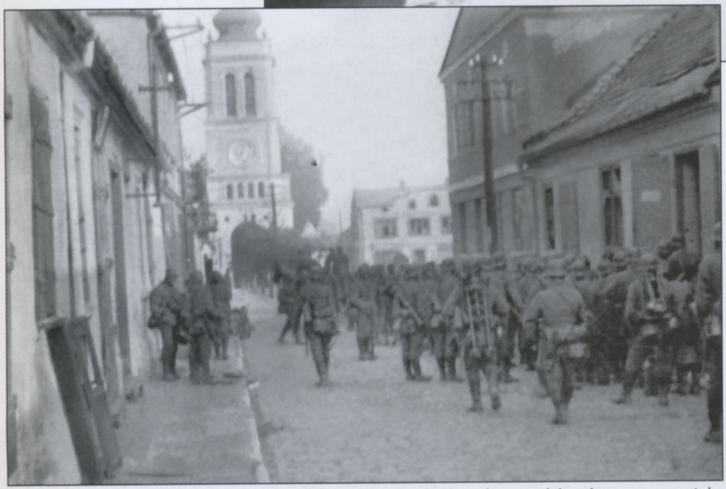
Men and horses taking a break in the wide-open, nearly treeless countryside common in much of Russia. This type of endless terrain was very disconcerting and demoralizing to the Germans, who were used to much more closed-in terrain.



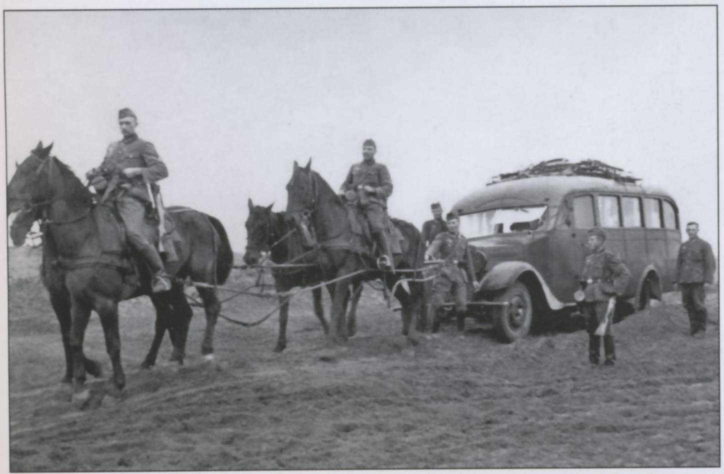
Another pause, this time along a tree-lined lane. Three men in the center of the photo are *Gefreiter* (corporals) as denoted by the inverted chevrons on their sleeves. Man on the right holds a signal disc, used for directing convoys.

Here a 4.7cm Pak Pz.Kpfw.I Ausf. B moves along a dusty road passing a column of vehicles halted on the road. After a month of victorious progress, the German armies were fighting on a front 1,000 miles wide. The Panzer divisions had exploited the terrain and concerted such a series of hammer blows to the Red Army that it was only a matter of time before the campaign in the East would be over. Yet in spite of these successes the Panzer divisions were thinly spread out. Although the armored spearheads were still achieving rapid victories on all fronts, supporting units were not keeping pace with them.

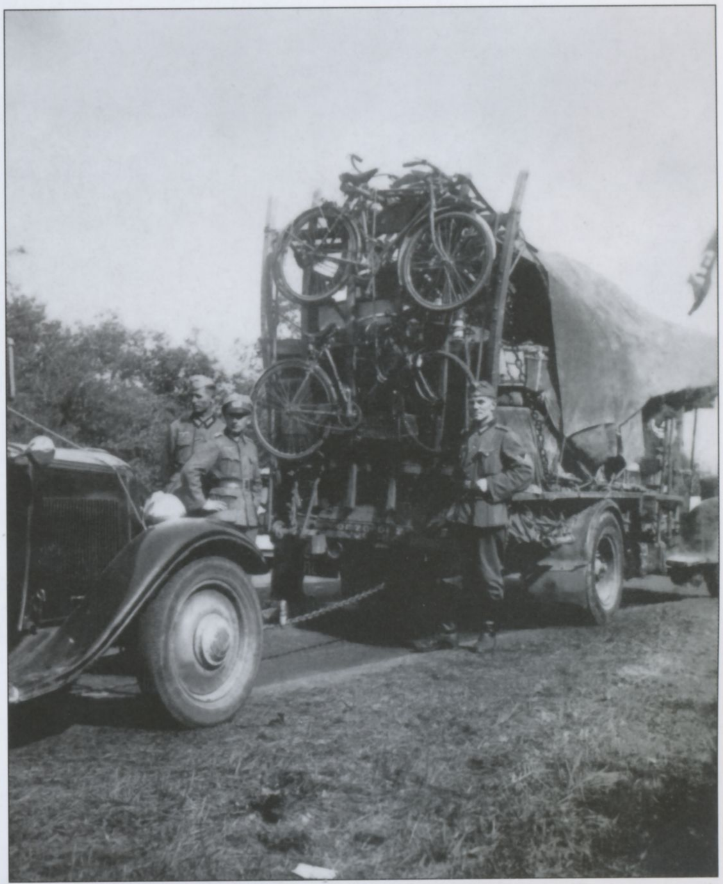




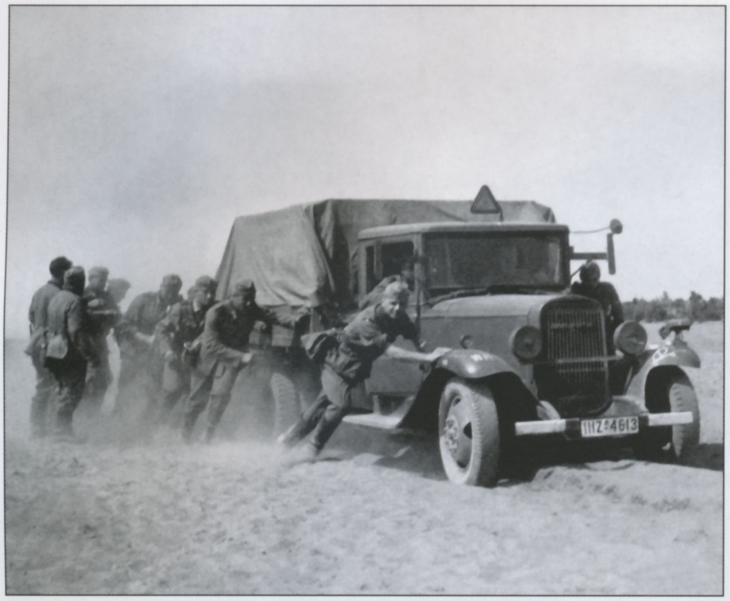
German troops enter the city of Smolensk during its rapid advance east in July 1941. When German forces reached this city they stood a mere 230 miles from the greatest prize of them all – Moscow. At an average rate of advance of eighteen miles a day an air of confidence spread through the ranks of the German Army.

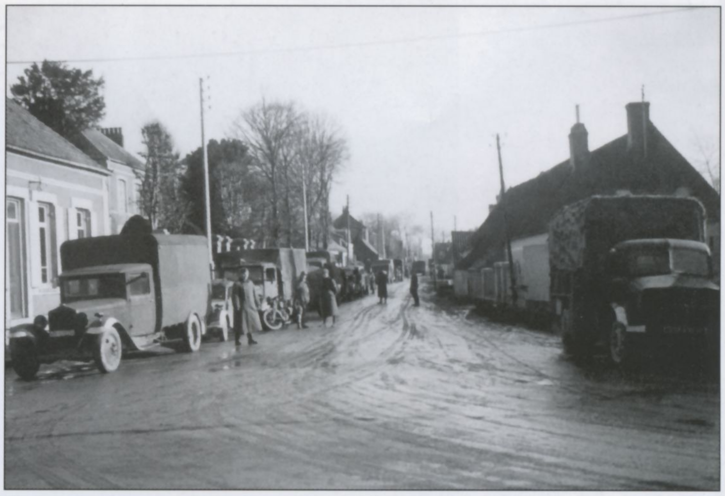


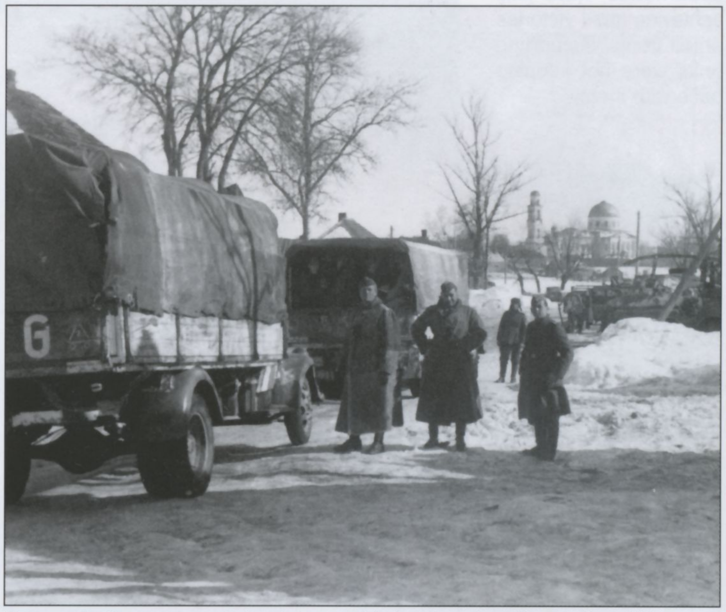
Like a fish out of water. A civilian bus, in all likelihood intended for German cities or highways is forced into service in the Russian countryside. A team of horses is enlisted to move it along. German NCO (second from right) tries to make the best of a bad situation.

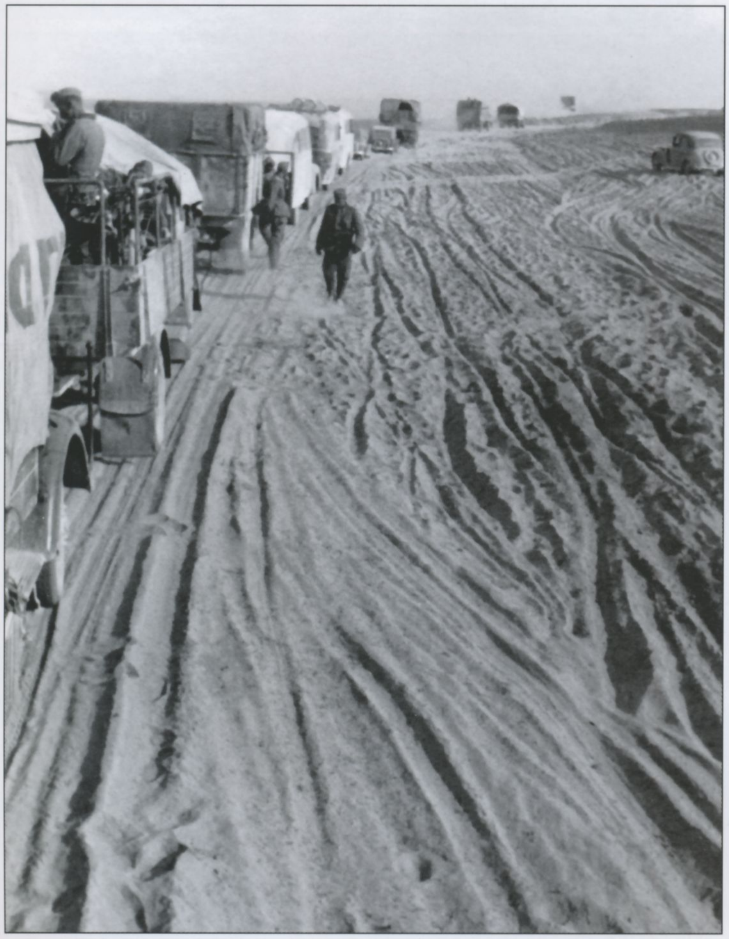


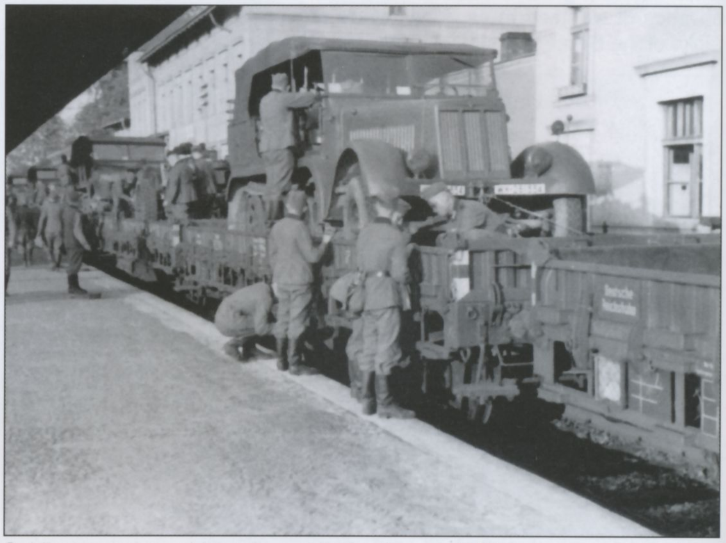
Many German convoys had a Gypsy look as seen here. In this case a truck is piled high with all manner of equipment, including bicycles, while using chains to tow another vehicle. At the far right can be seen a Nazi flag, surely an air recognition measure.

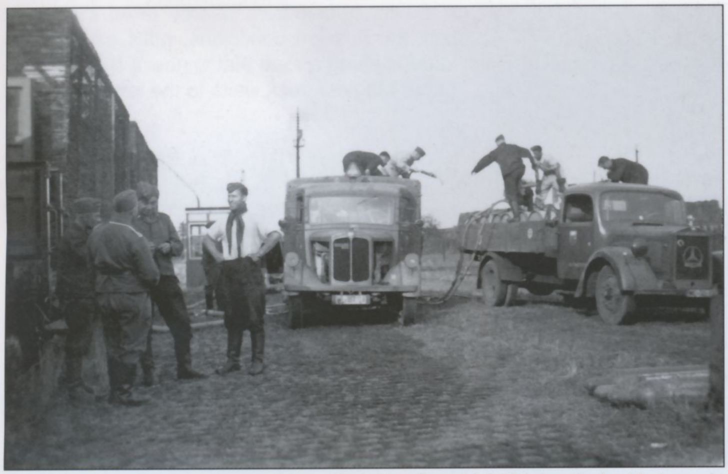

German soldiers push a light truck in sandy soil that tripled fuel consumption and torpedoed German pre-war logistic estimates.


German convoy of trucks, automobiles and motorcycles pauses in a surprisingly intact town. To the right is an Opel Blitz truck, the most numerous German type.

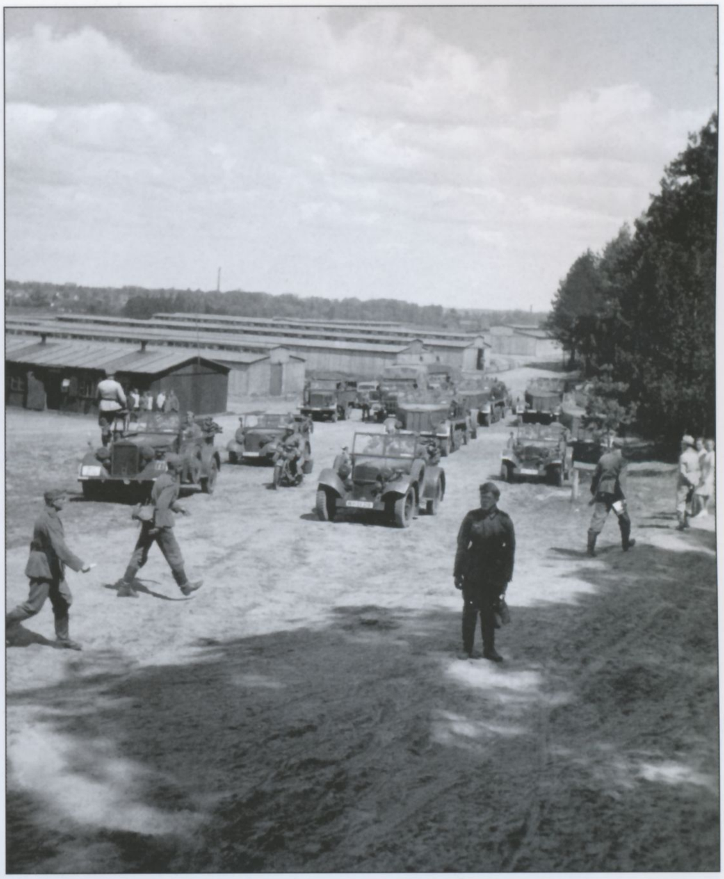

Convoy halts in a good-sized town with its church still standing. White "G" identifies these vehicles as belonging to Guderian's Second Panzer Group, part of Army Group Center.


Just like driving in the desert. Heavily laden convoy of trucks, staff cars, civilian automobiles and busses slowly make their way across the featureless terrain.

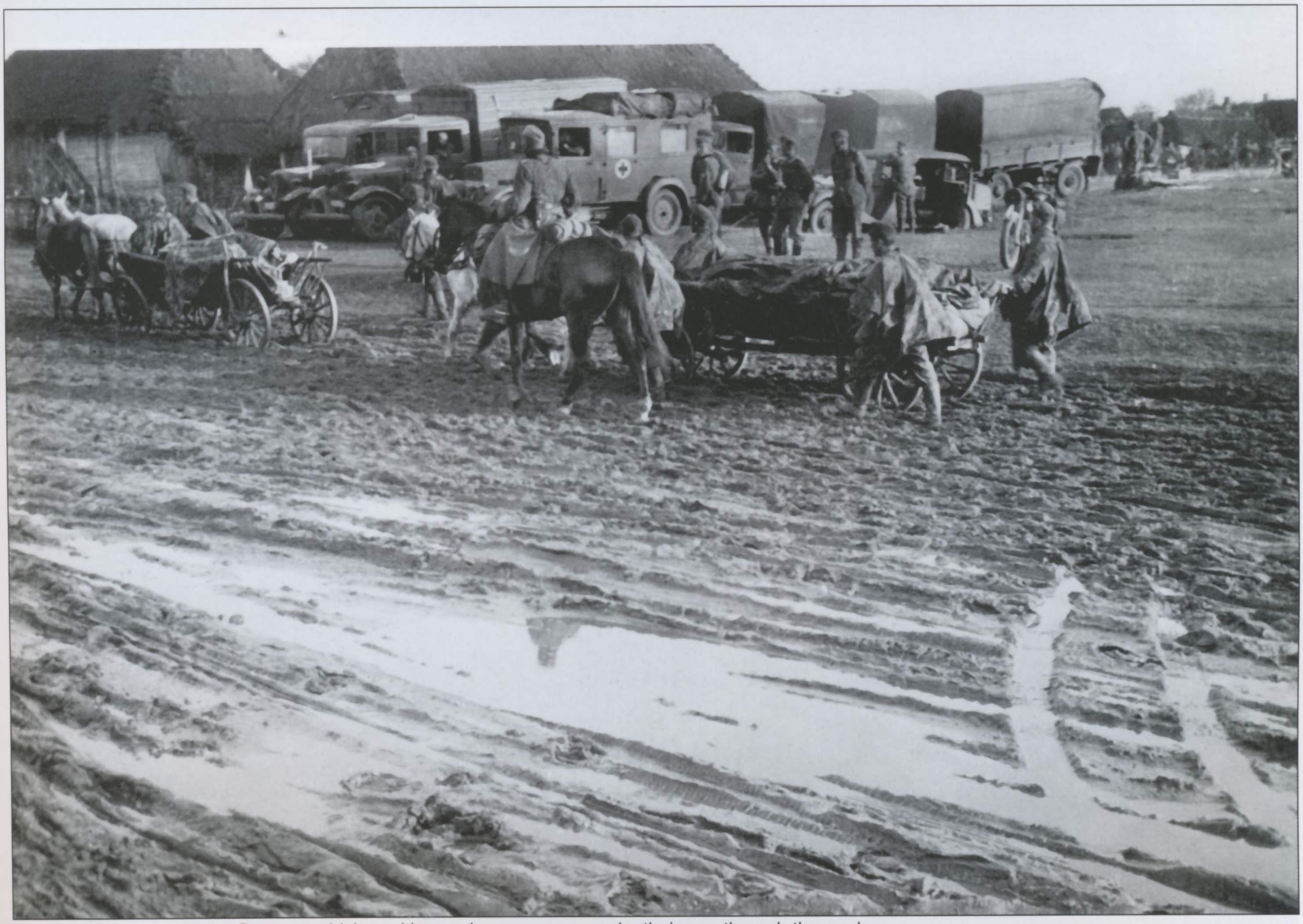

Soldiers prepare vehicles for a rail trip, the most efficient way to move large units long distances. The men are securing Sd.Kfz.7s to the rail cars. These cars are clearly marked "Deutsche Reichsbahn," meaning the Germans have converted the Soviet rail gauge to their use.



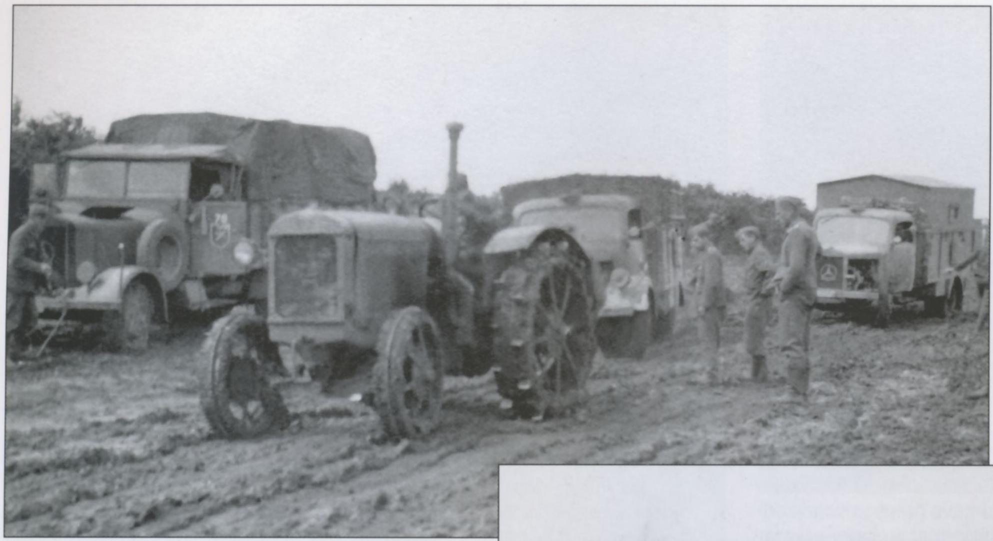
Undoubtedly at a rear-area base, Daimler-Benz L3000 loaded with barrels transfers fuel to another truck. The Wehrmacht did not have many specialized fuel tanker trucks including powered pumps, so most fuel transfers were done using the slow and labor-intensive hand pump method and small barrels or even smaller "jerry cans."



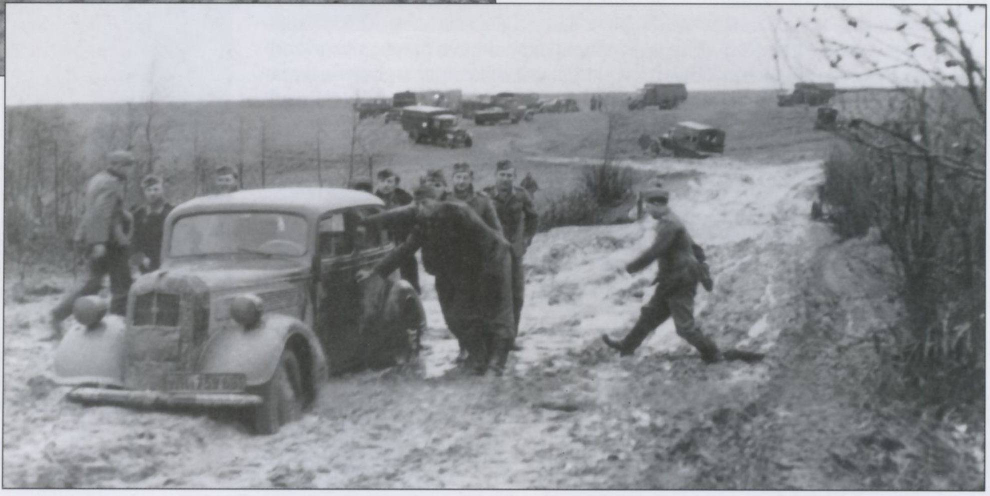
Another base scene, this time probably far to the rear, judging by all the unarmed men walking about. Staff cars to the front and flanks seem to be Stoewer Type 40s, while the main convoy appears to be made up of 8-ton Sd.Kfz.7 half tracks.



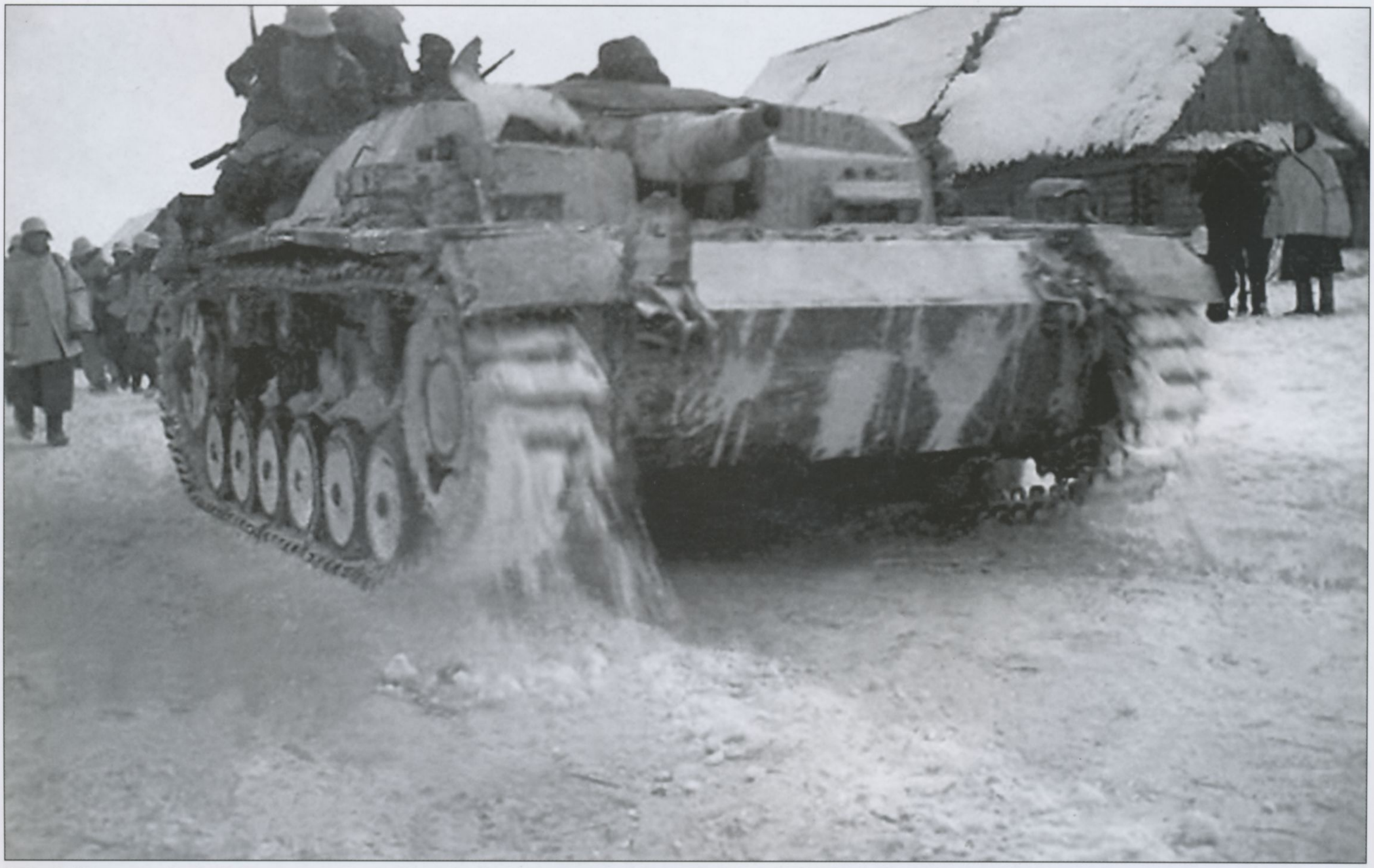
Probably after a good rain, German vehicle and horse-drawn convoys make their way through the mud.



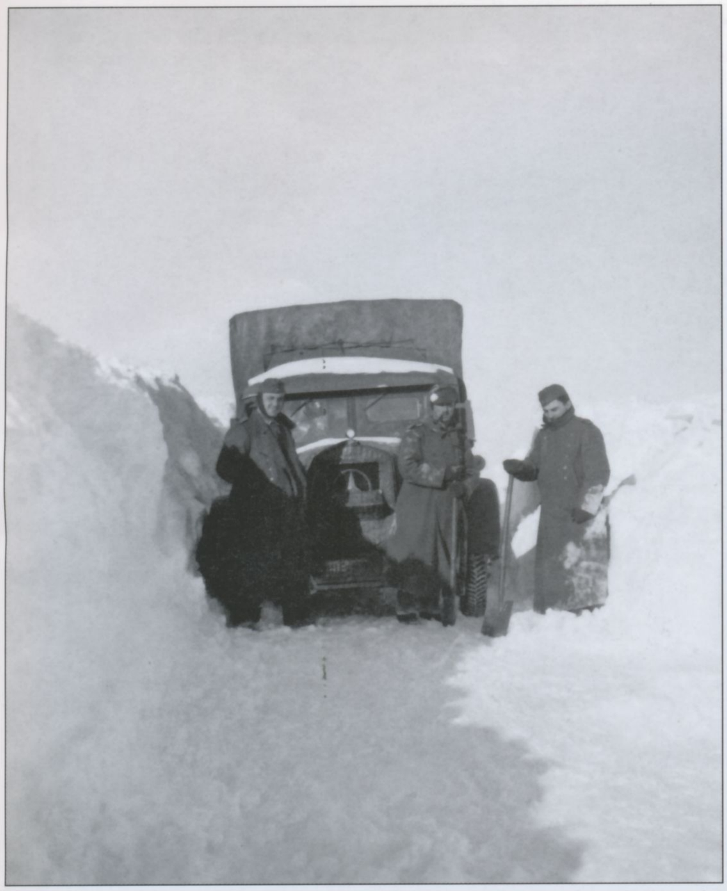
A Soviet tractor from nearby farm, purposely built for Russian conditions, pulls a couple of L3000s along a road that is now a river of mud. Large Magirus truck waits to the left.



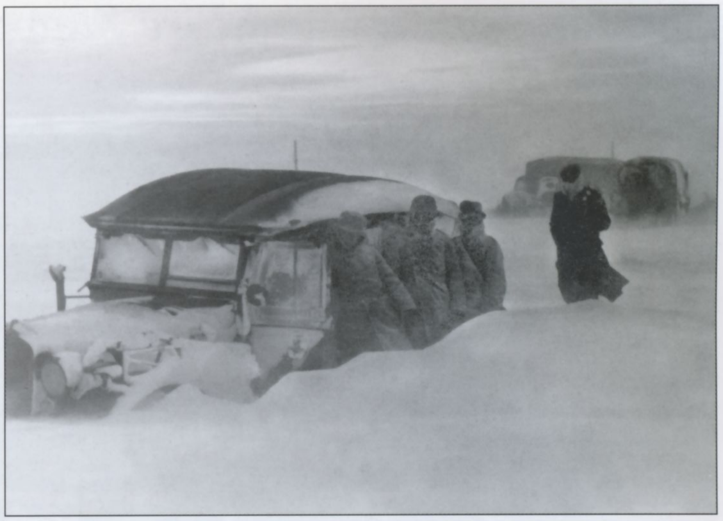
Axel-deep mud plays havoc with civilian auto forced into military service. Underpowered engines, narrow tires and low ground clearance made such vehicles totally unsuited for this kind of terrain. Again, men have to put their backs into this hard work.



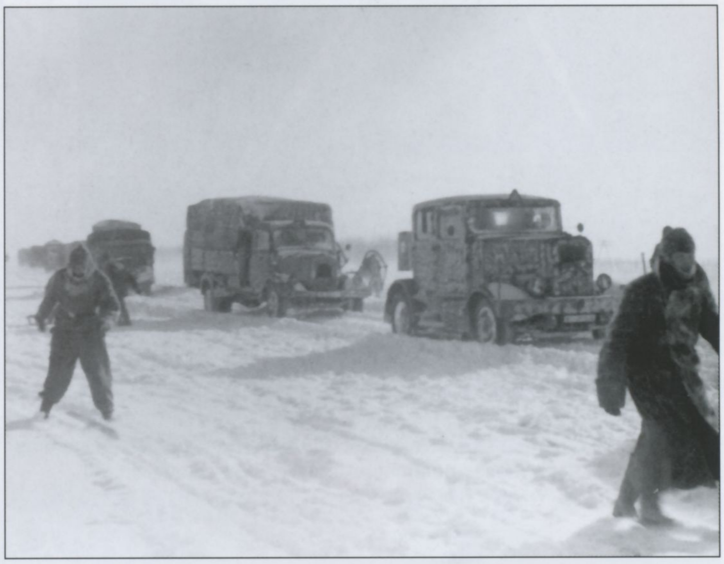
A StuG.III passes through a snow covered village in December 1941. Although tracked vehicles were capable of coping with snow and mud, the Russian winter of 1941 had been so severe that it actually ground to halt the bulk of the German armored striking force.



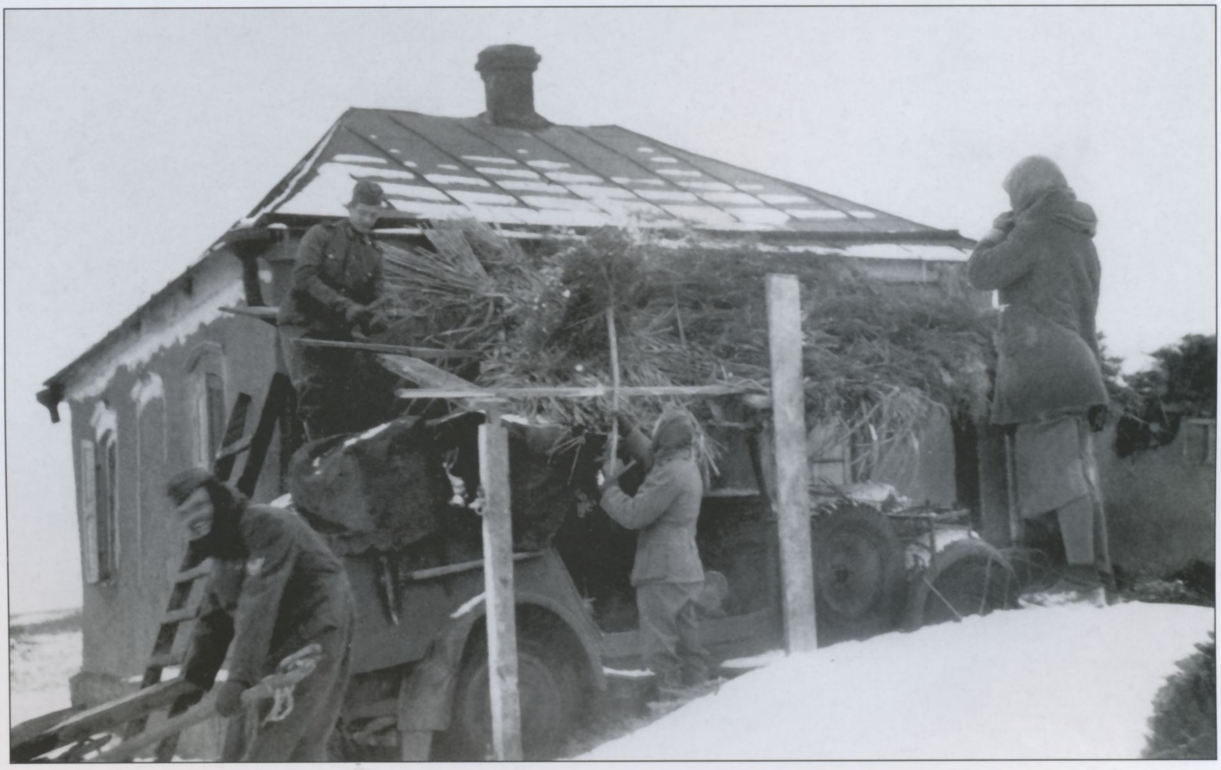
Snow drifts as high as a man. Three soldiers in greatcoats clear the way for this Daimler-Benz L3000 truck.



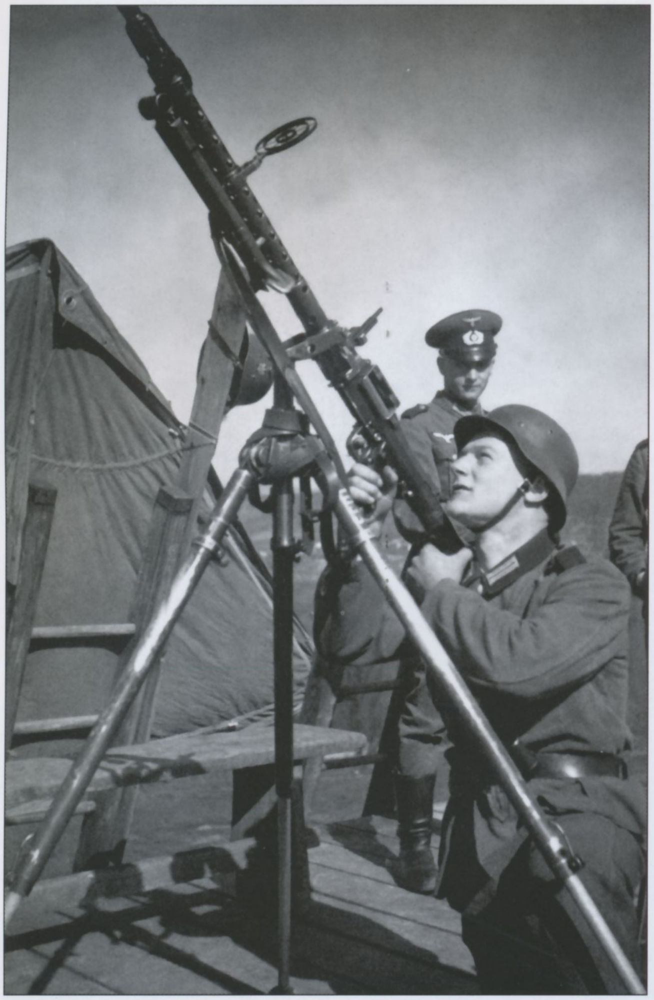
What to do? With the sun very low on the horizon and their backs to the biting wind, German soldiers contemplate how to get their vehicle, probably a Wanderer WII, out of a deep snow drift.



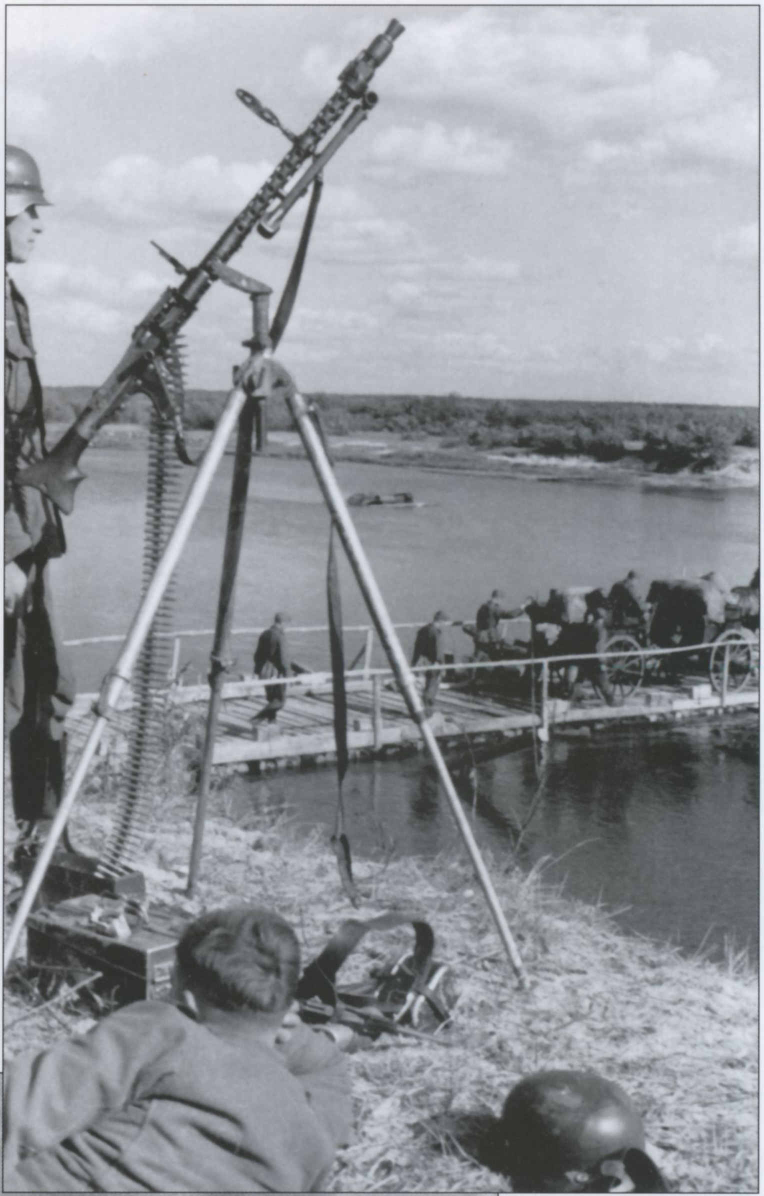
More blizzard conditions. In the foreground men walking with the freezing wind to their backs. Behind them is a convoy of typically mixed vehicle types and further back (between the first and second vehicles) a native panje wagon with its distinctive harness.

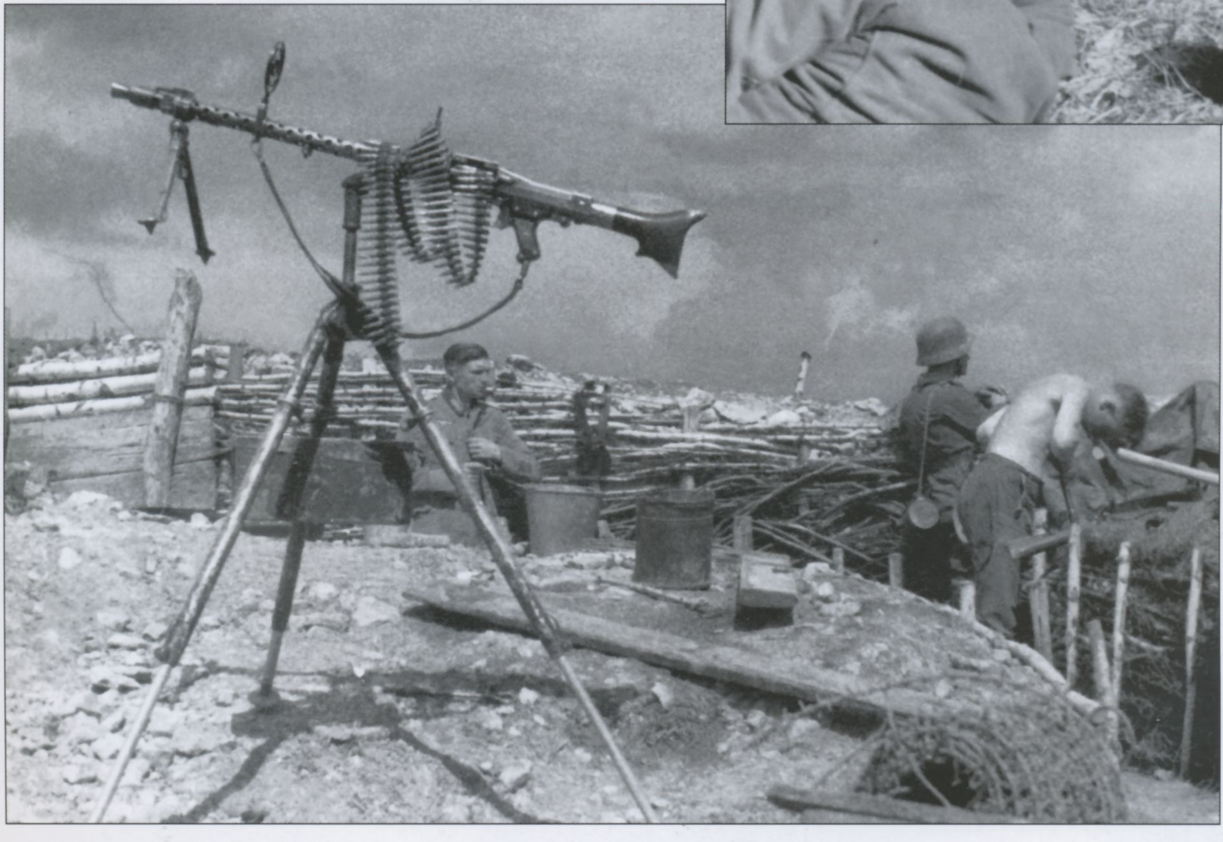


Germans in all manner of dress camouflage their staff car next to a well-built Russian structure. A native woman in a skirt looks on.

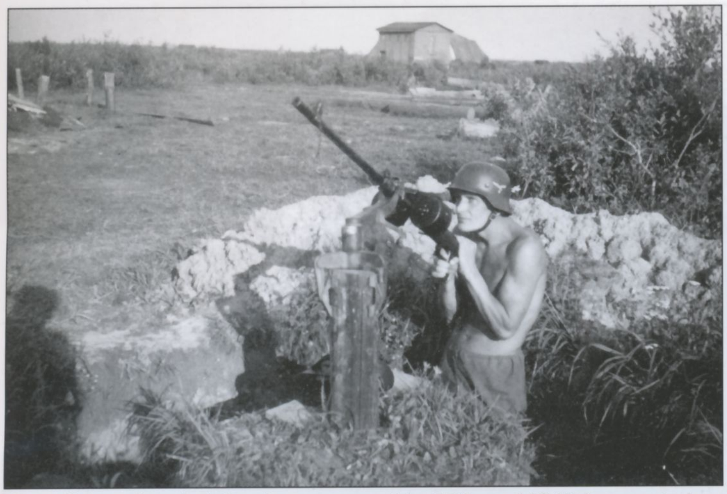


Training photograph (notice no ammunition!) of MG34 in antiaircraft mode.

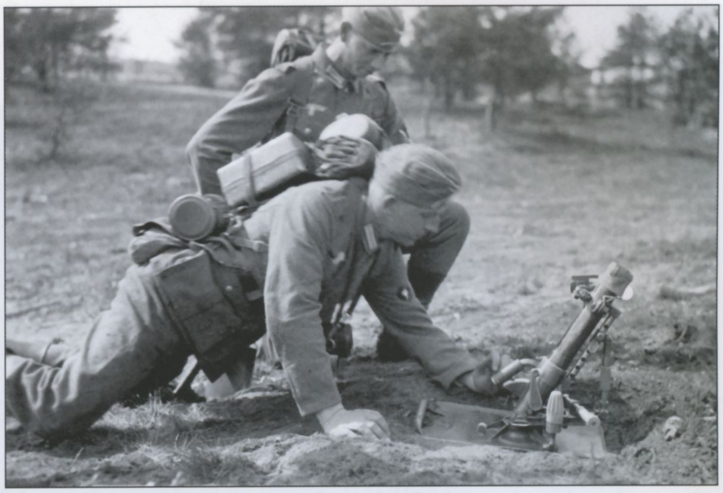




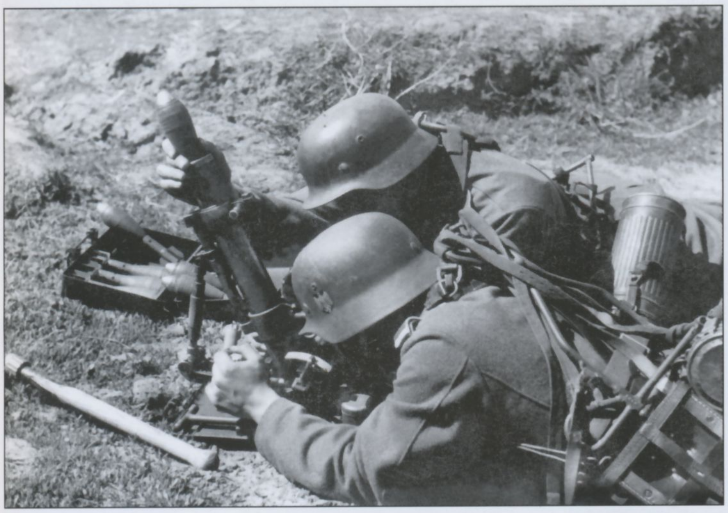
Two photos of MG34s ready for action shows machinegun crew overwatching bridge crossing a fairly wide river, while lower photo shows a defensive position.



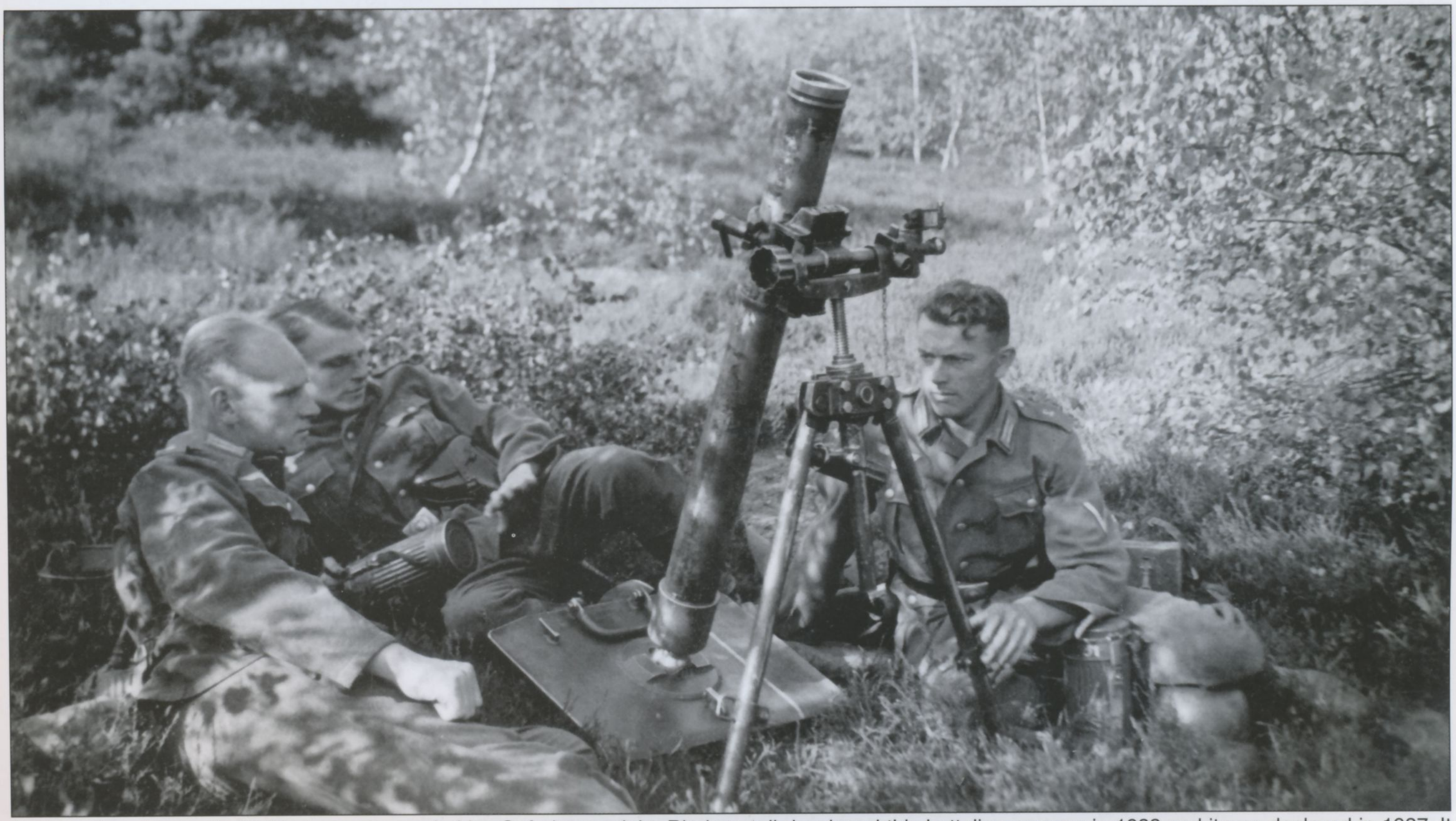
Normally an aircraft defensive weapon, this 7.62mm MG15 is mounted on the ground.



The 5cm *Grenatenwerfer* 36 mortar gave the infantry company its own fire support. The Rheinmetall weapon weighed 12.5kg and came in two pieces: tube and base plate. Man in foreground wears grenadier's qualification patch on his left sleeve and a box of ammo on his back.

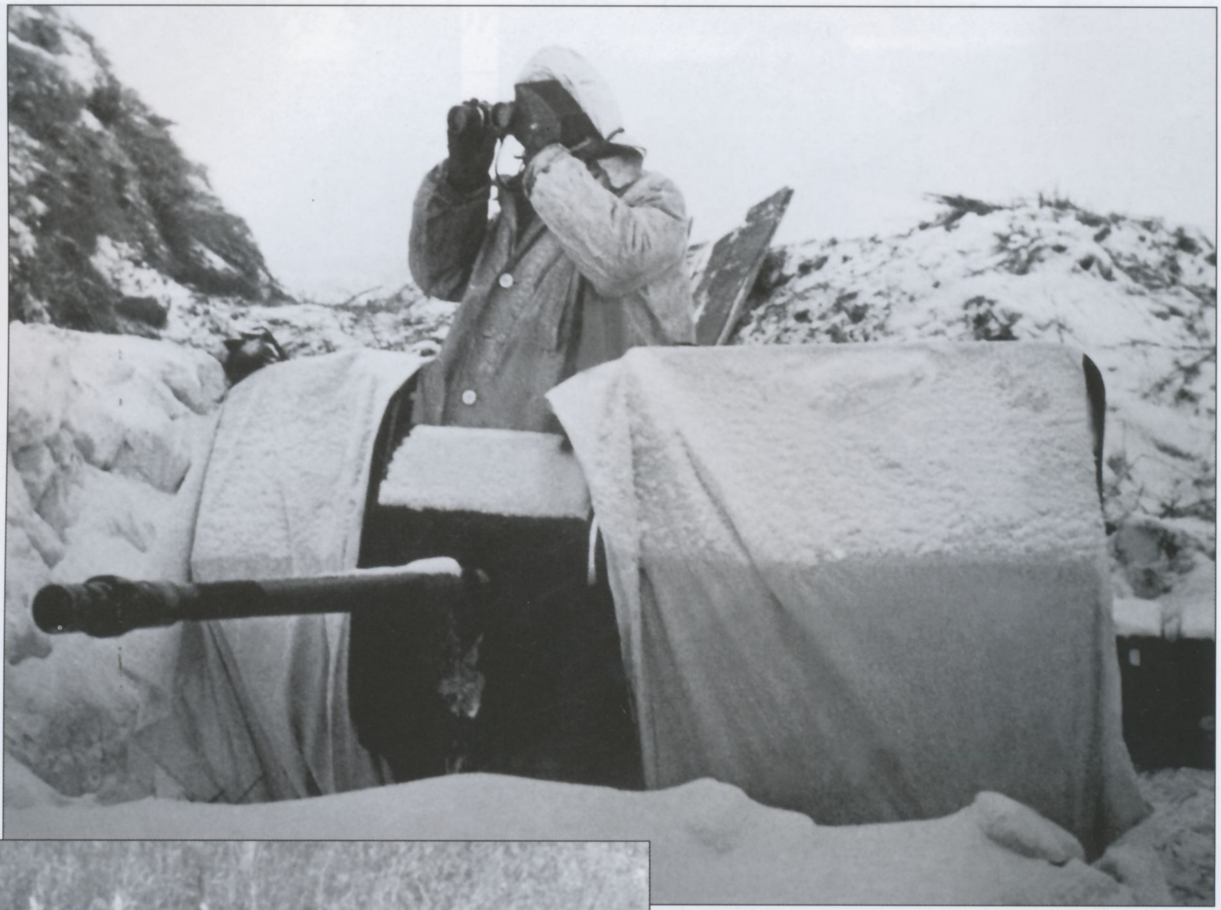


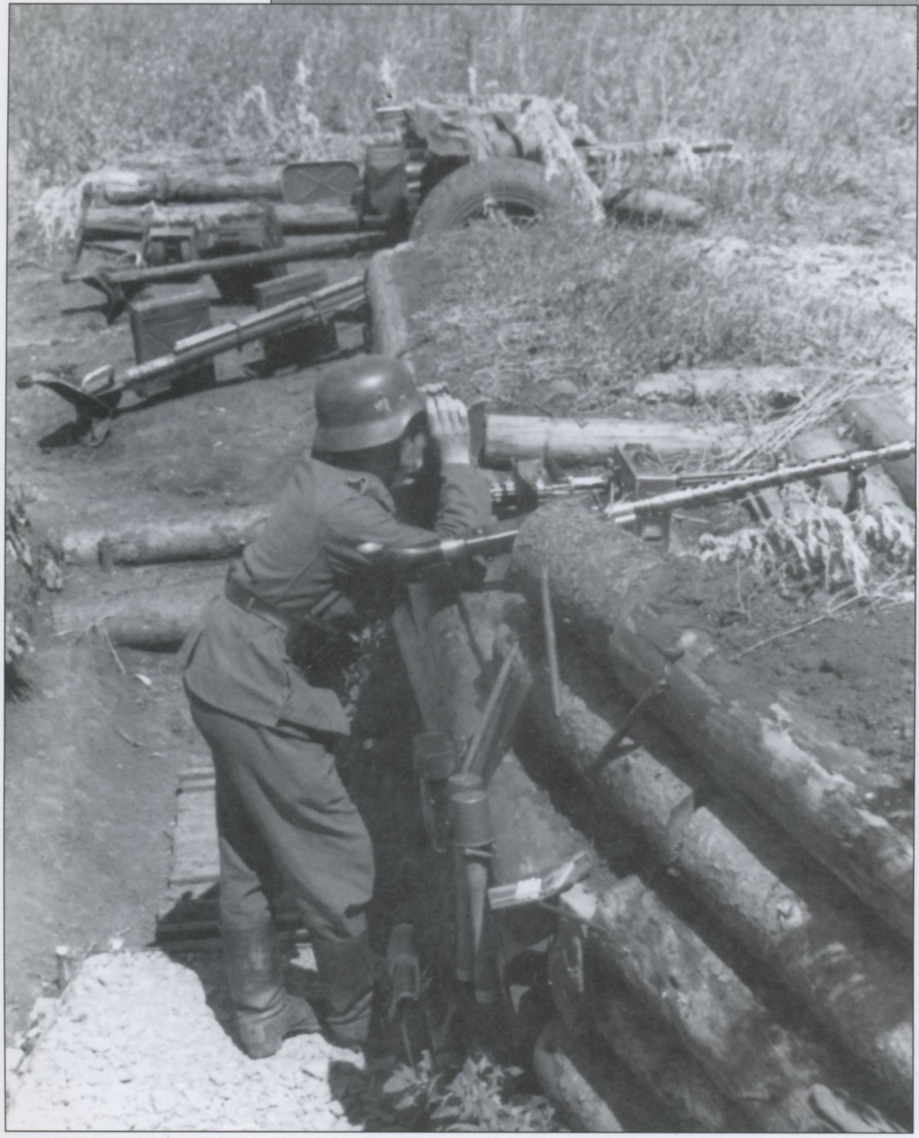
Another photo of the 5cm mortar providing a good view of the .9kg round and all the straps on the mens' backs required to carry it. An improved version came out in 1940.



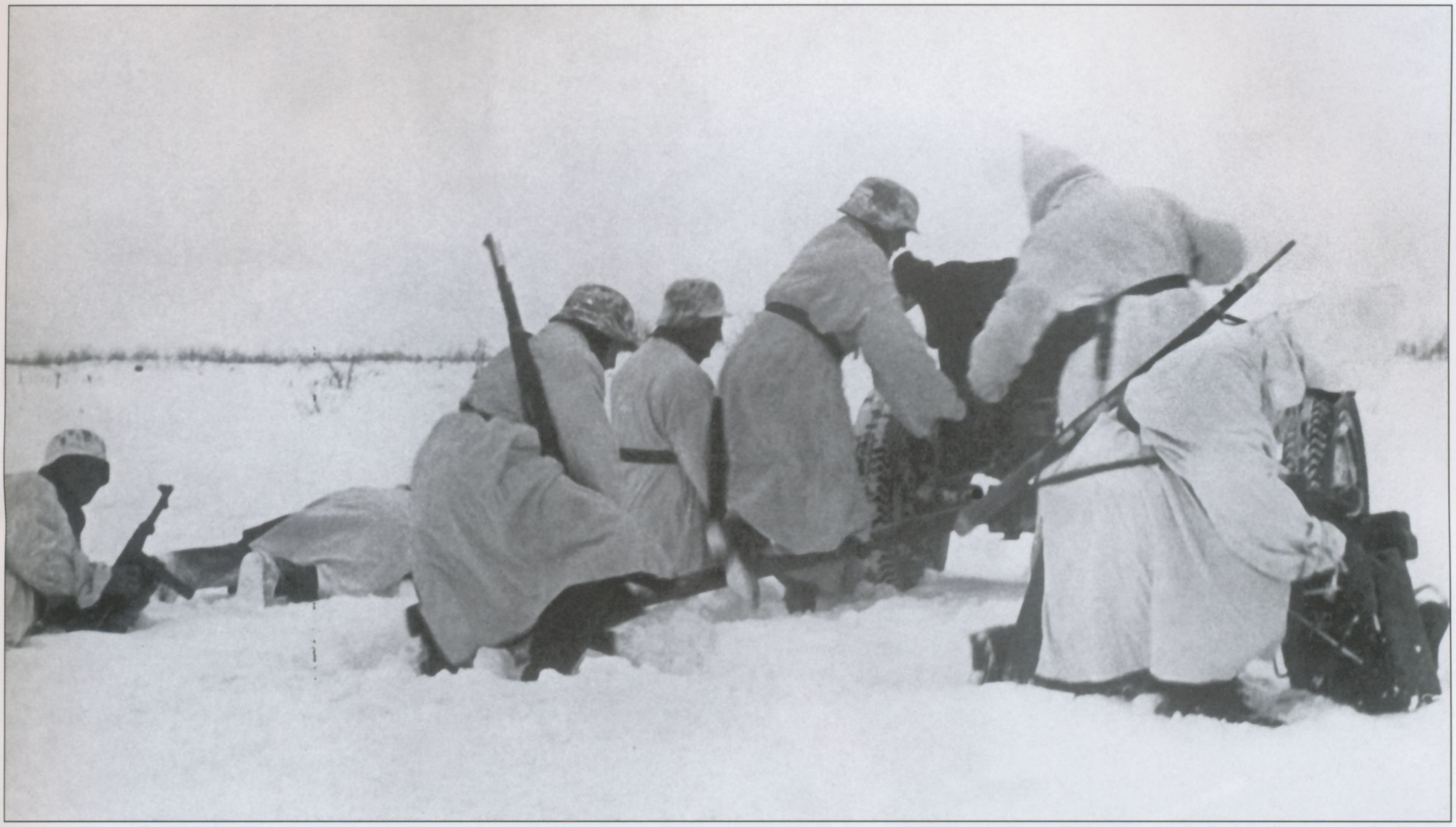
An 8cm *Grenatenwerfer* 34 Mortar and crew, led by *Gefreiter* on right. Rheinmetall developed this battalion weapon in 1932 and it was deployed in 1937. It weighed 57kg and consisted of tube, bipod and base plate. It had a range of 2400m.

A 2cm Rheinmetall FlaK38 with its crew. This excellent weapon could also engage targets on the ground.

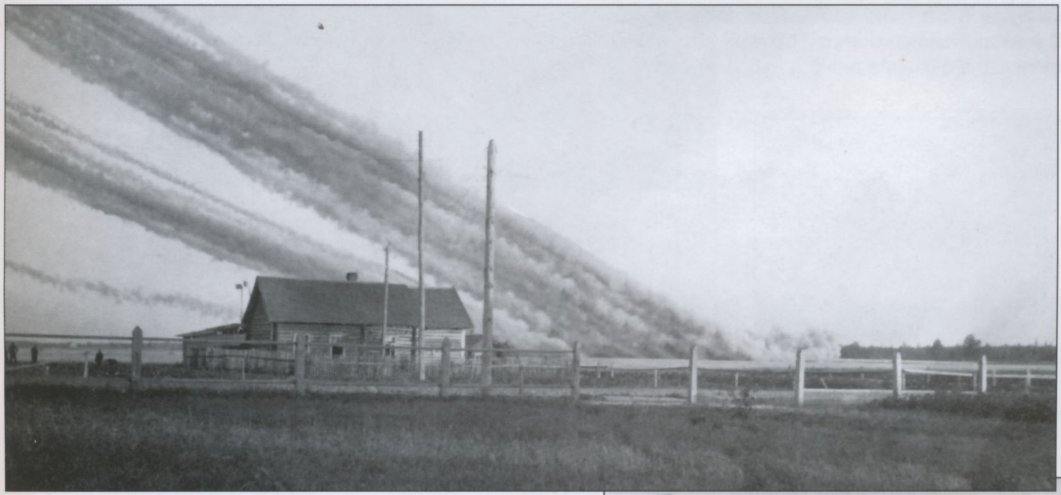




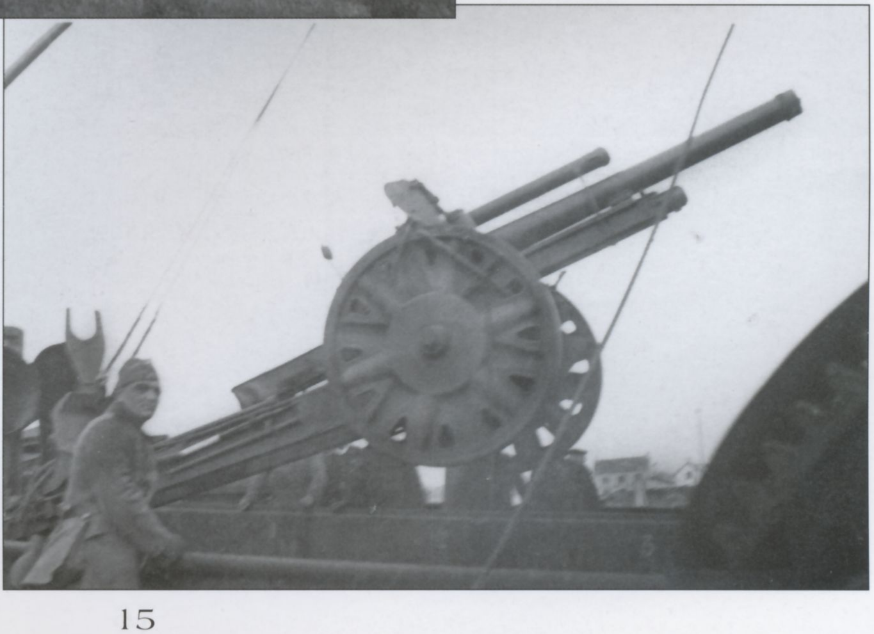
Well dug in defensive position with 3.7cm PaK35/36 in background and MG34. Ammunition boxes are at the ready by the gun and this private has many hand grenades if necessary.



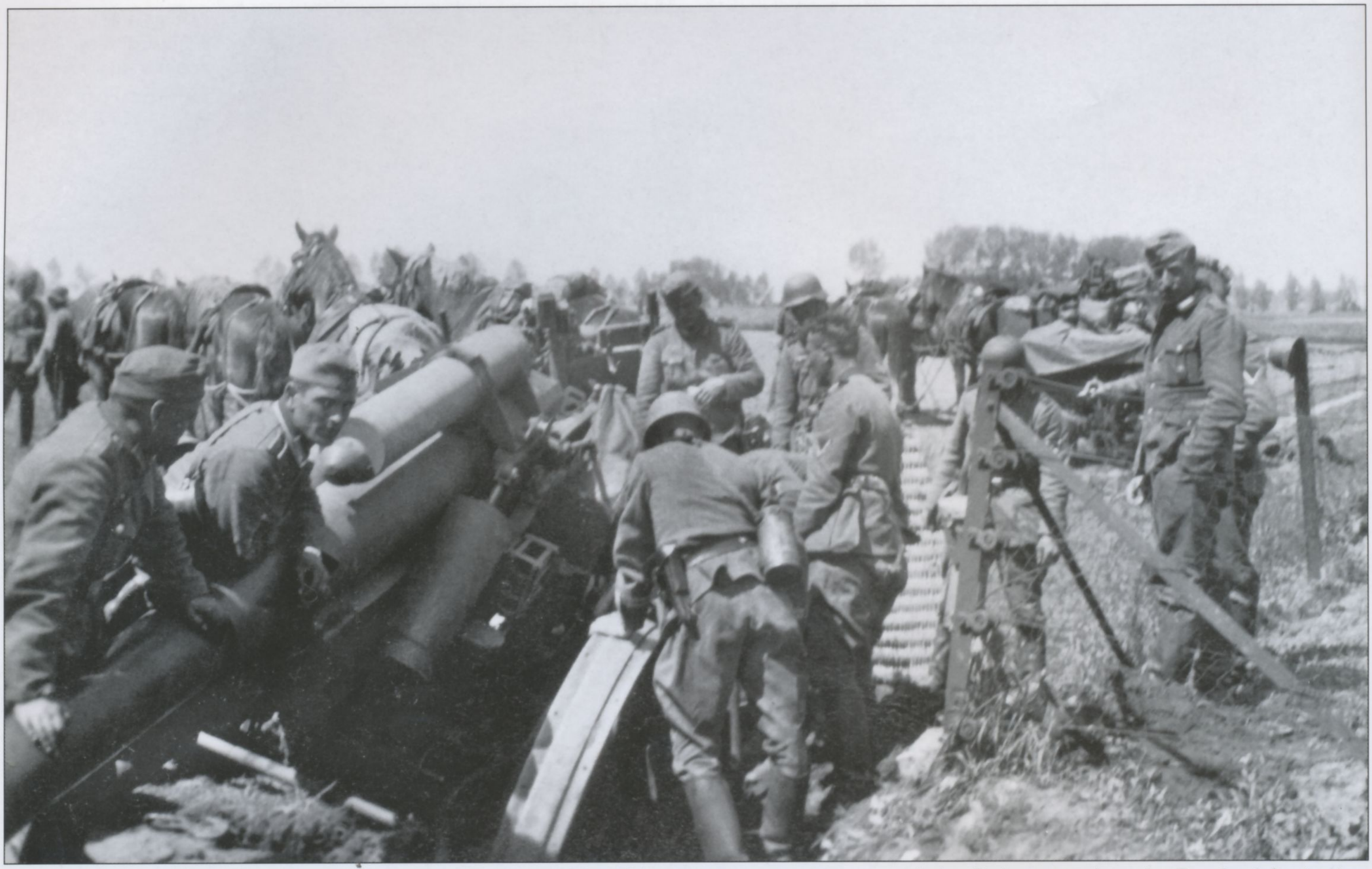
Another 3.7cm PaK35/36. This antitank gun had already proven to be practically useless during the Western campaign in 1940. Against the superior Soviet tanks encountered during Barbarossa it had no effect.



Smoke trails from the 15cm *Nebelwerfer* 41 (smoke launcher); round on lower left seems to have been errant. This version of *Nebelwerfer* was mounted on towed trailers, although later variants were mounted on half tracks and even later models were 21cm size. Despite its name, the "smoke launcher" was really an area artillery weapon.

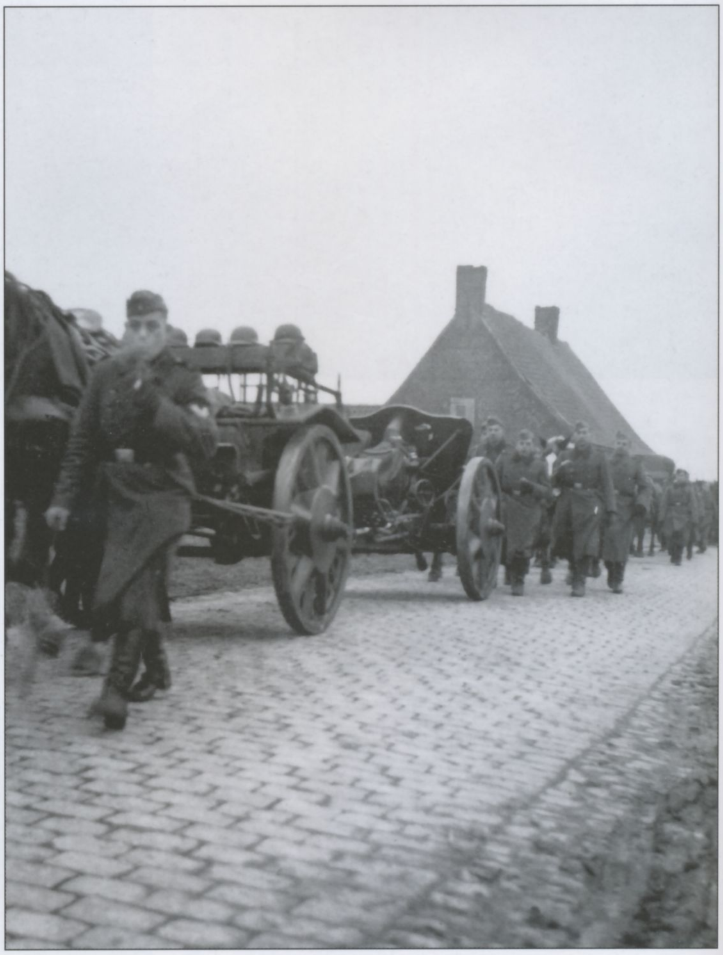


A Krupp 7.5cm *Feldkanone* 38 rail loaded for long distance travel.



The weight of a 10cm *Kanone* 18 collapsed a small Russian bridge. This was a common occurrence during Barbarossa where the Russian infrastructure could not support modern vehicles and weapons.

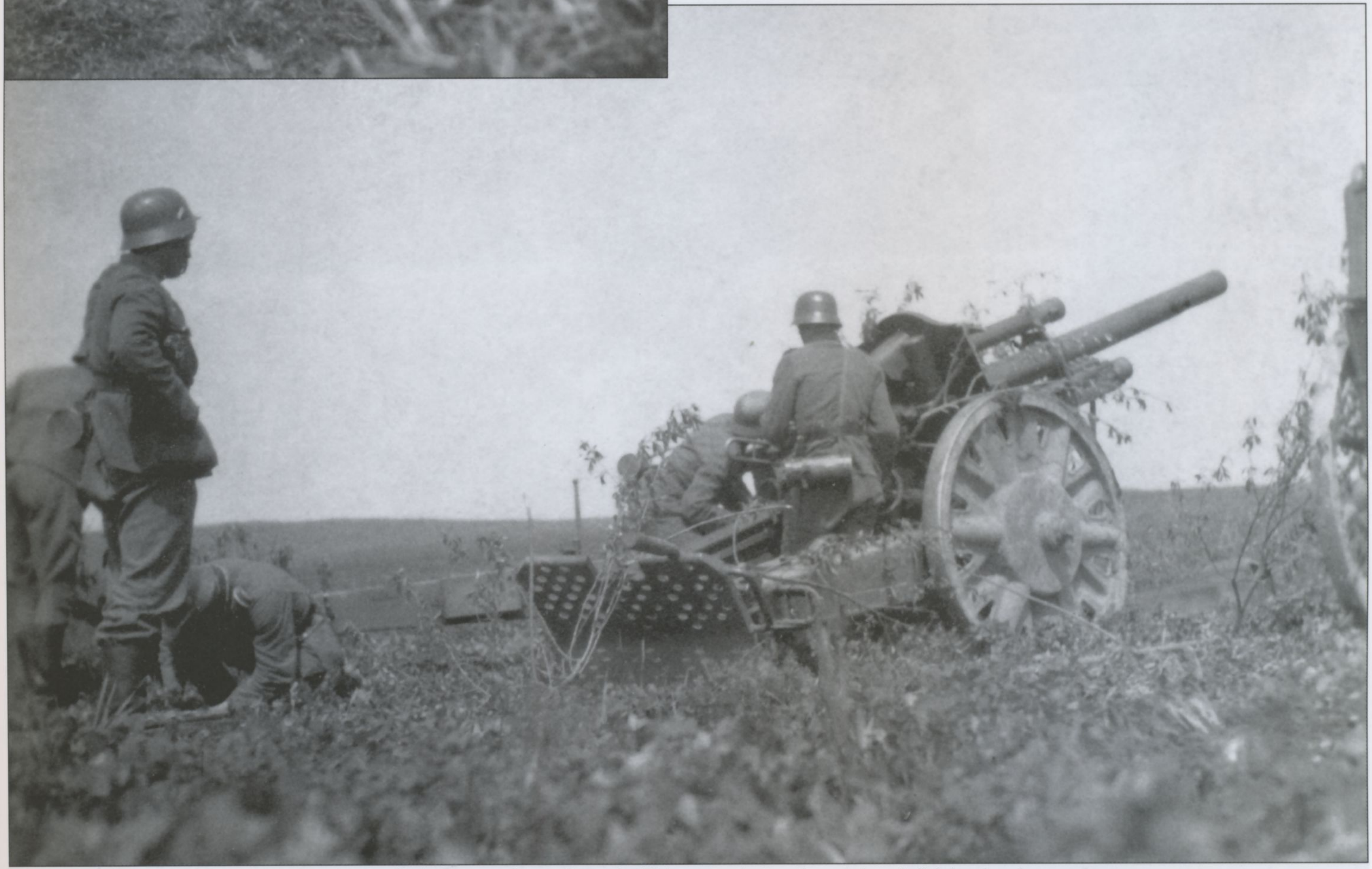
A battery of 10cm *Kanone* 18 draped with camouflage in a large forest clearing.



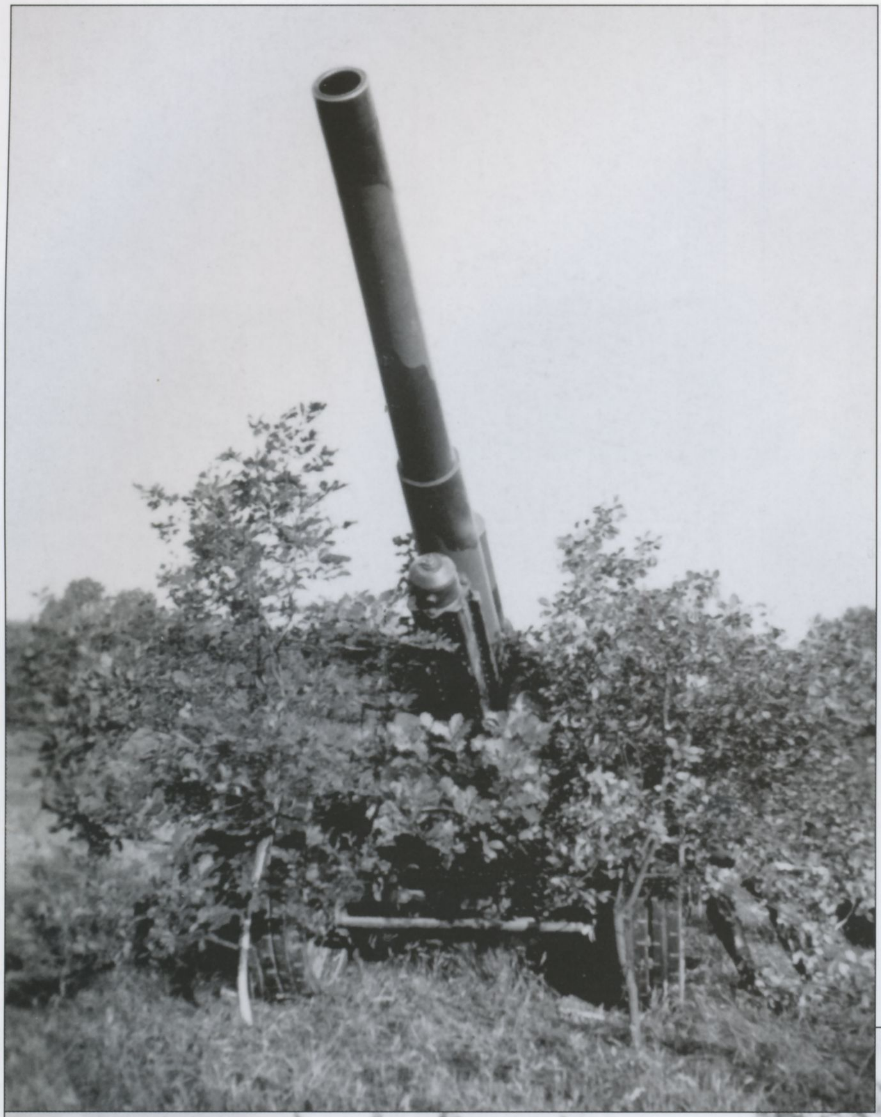
A column of Rheinmetall 10.5cm *leichte Feldhaubitze* 18 (l.FH18) move down a brick-paved lane. By 1935 this weapon was the Wehrmacht's standard howitzer. It could fire its 14.8kg round between 470-1,065m.

A battery of 15cm *schwere Feldhaubitze* 18 (s.FH18) can be seen with their somewhat large crews. This was a heavy support weapon used by corps- and army artillery units.

A 10.5cm *leichte Feldhaubitze* 18 (l.FH18) in action. This light howitzer could fire a 5.4kg projectile a distance of 11,800m.

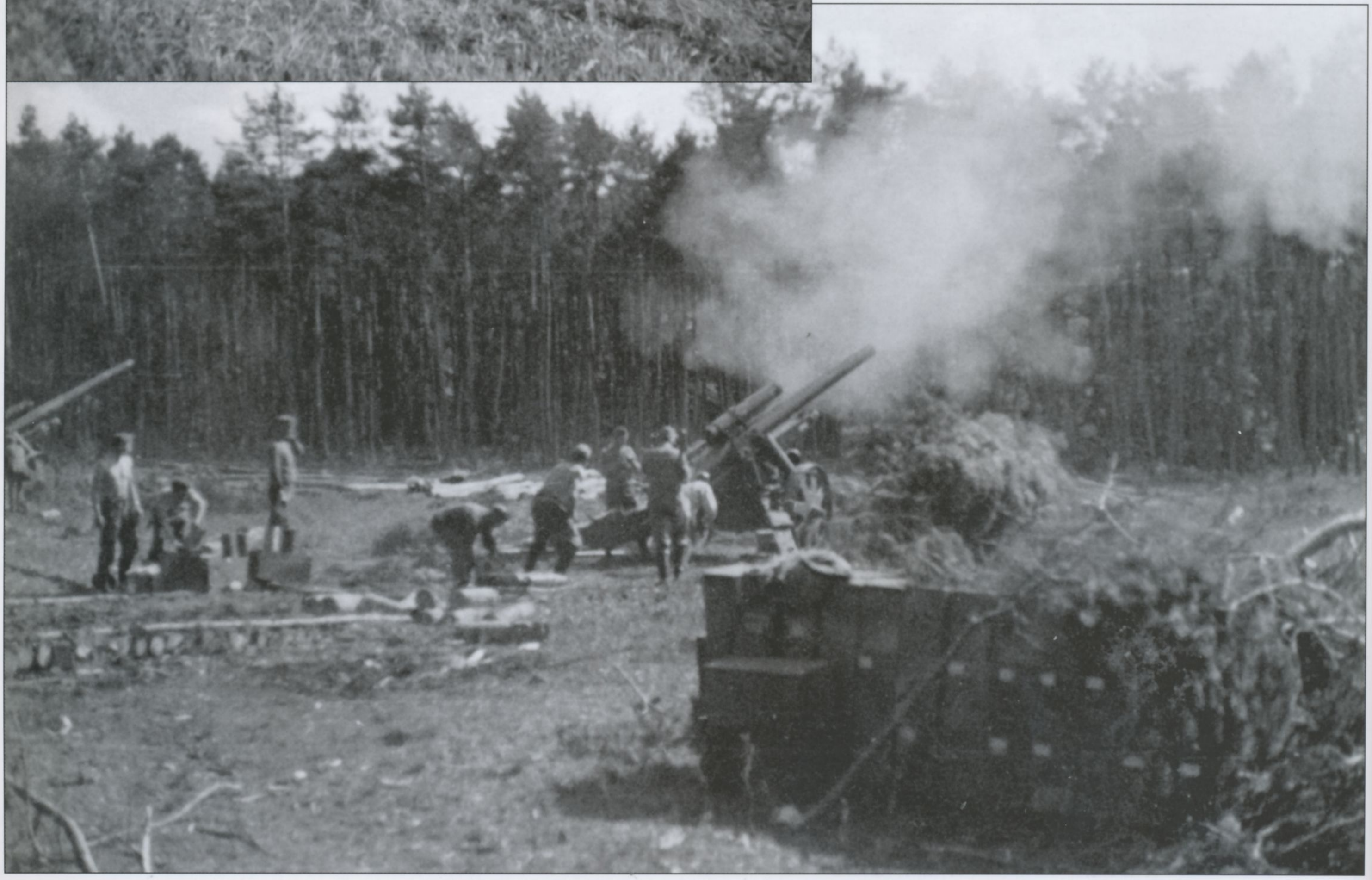


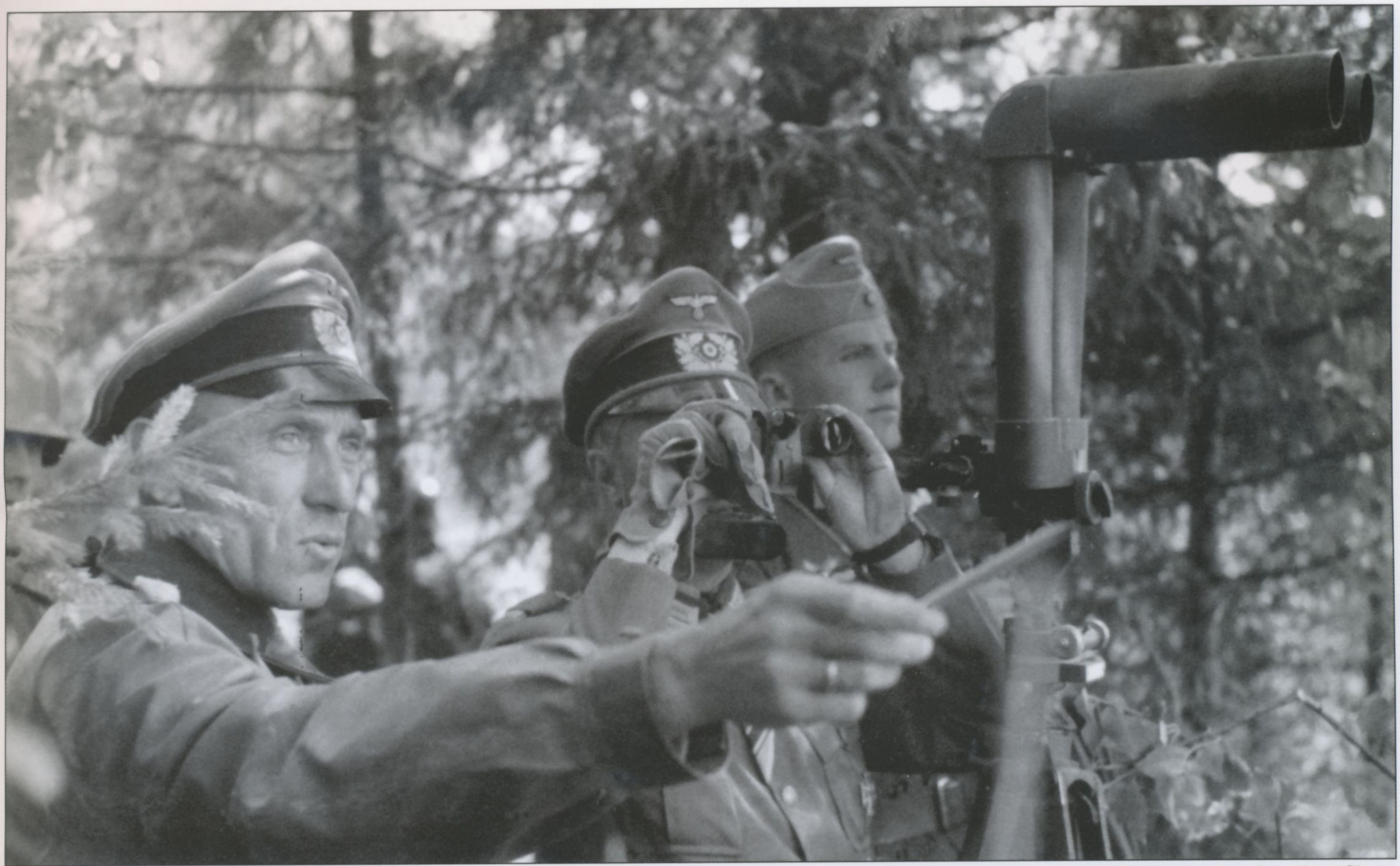
The 10.5cm *leichte Feldhaubitze* 18 with its distinctive perforated spade. This served at regimental and division level.



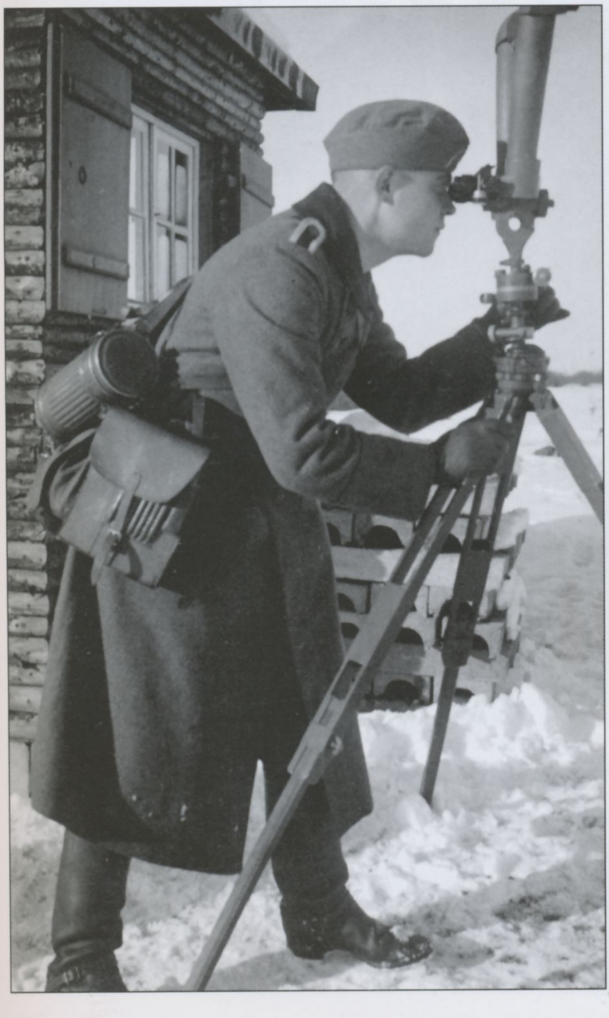
The business end of the Krupp/Rheinmetall 15cm s.FH18. It fired a 43.5kg projectile 13,325m. Too heavy for horses, the weapon had to be towed by a half-track prime mover. It is a contemporary of the Soviet 152mm M37, which had a range of nearly three times the German gun.

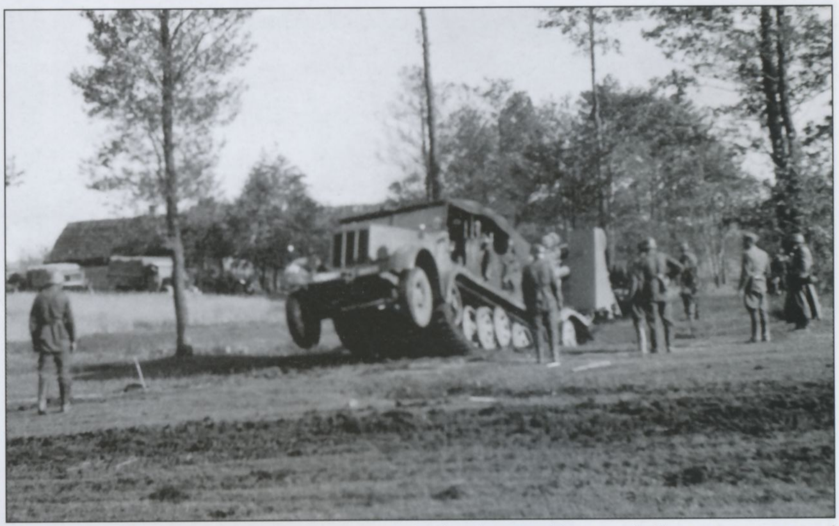
A 15cm s.FH18 firing. As this photo shows, the ammunition for this massive weapon came in two parts: powder bag and projectile.





Two officers probably discussing their artillery support while two soldiers look on. Man looking through binoculars has earned both classes of the Iron Class. To the right is the artillery spotter's binocular telescope.



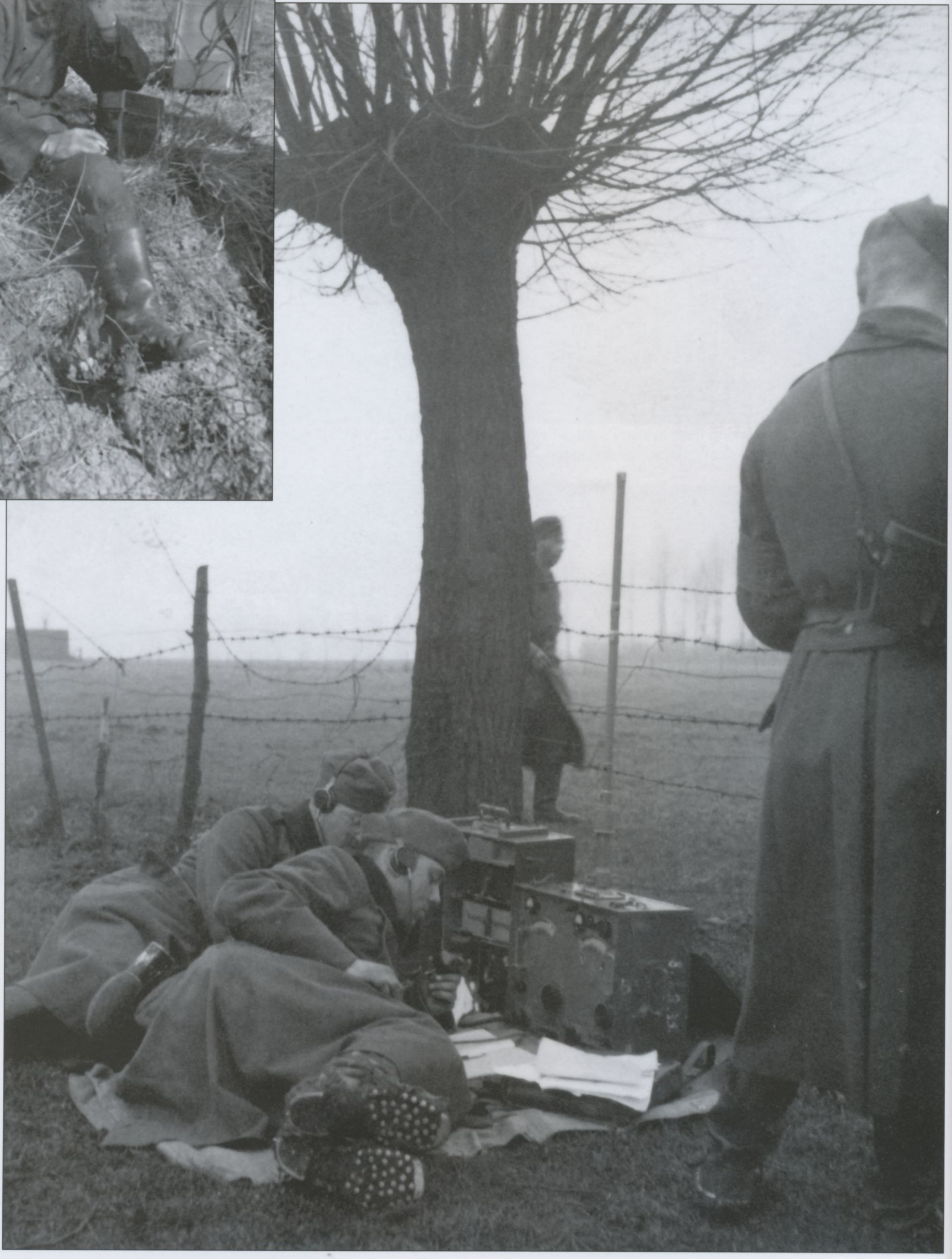


Sd.Kfz.7 half-track prime mover seems to be having trouble negotiating uneven ground while towing an "88."

Artillery observer at his spotting telescope. On his back can be seen his gas mask carrying canister and *Meldekartentasche* (dispatch case).

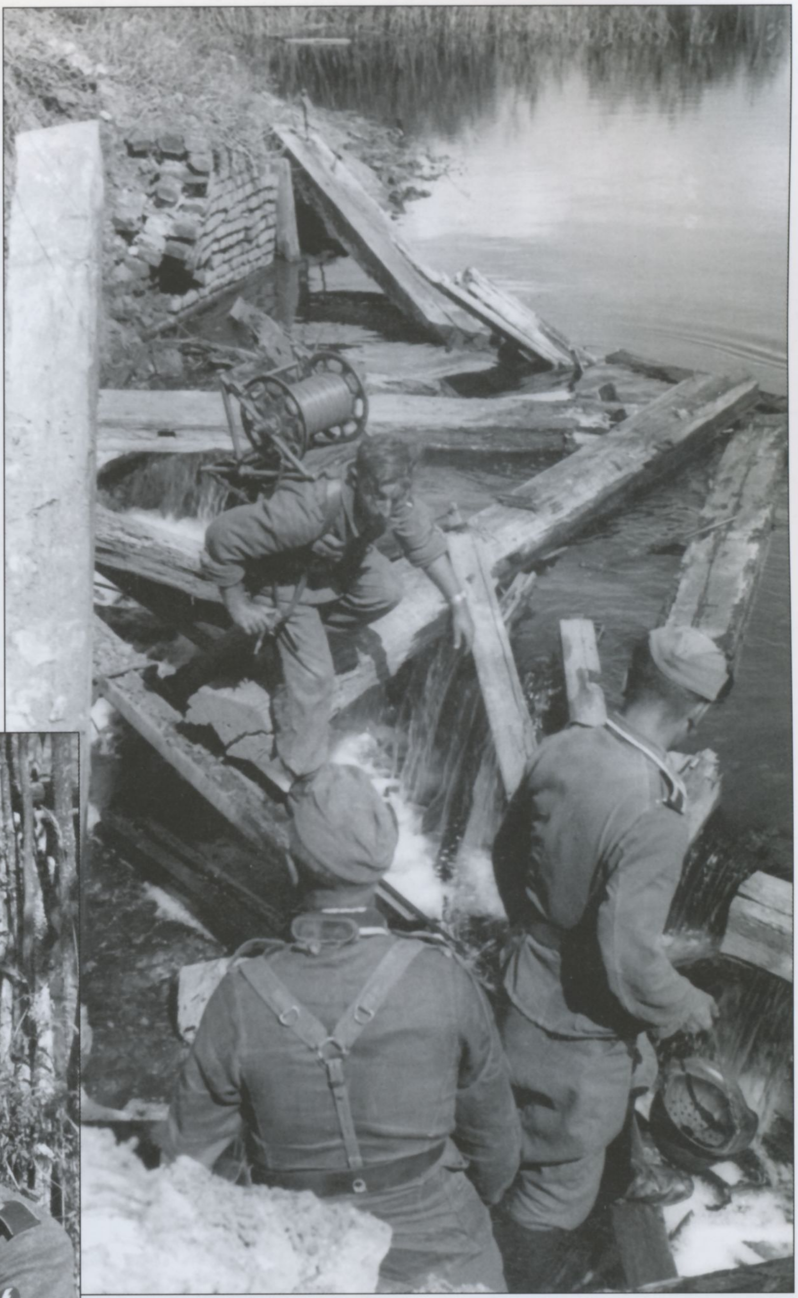
German Communication Equipment & Engineering Effort

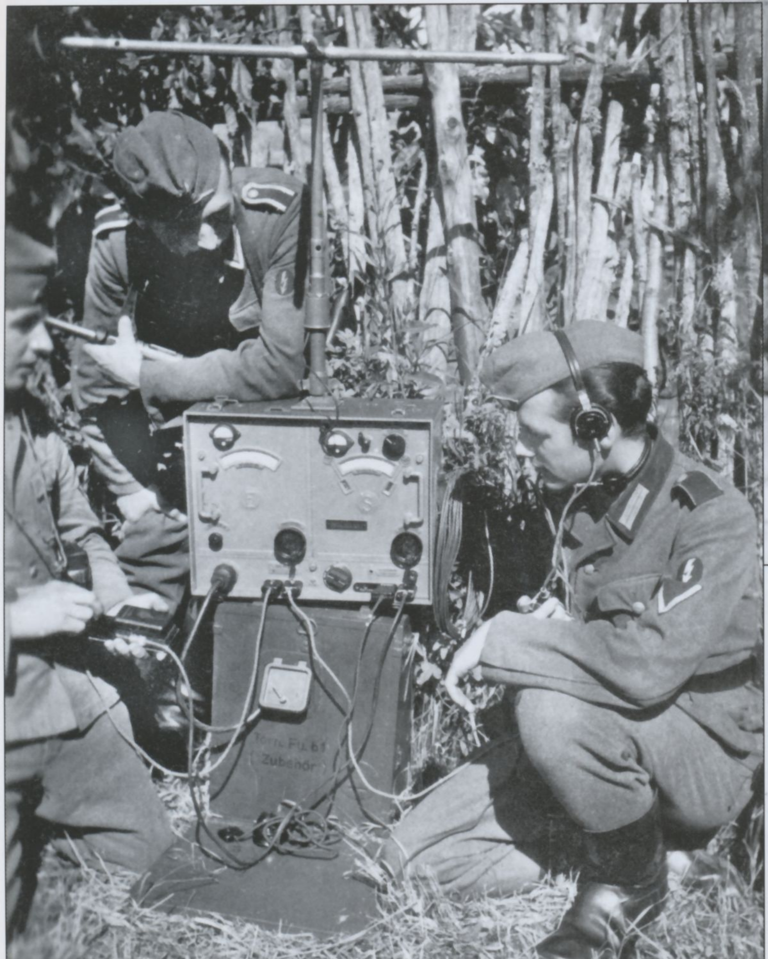
Luftwaffe troops using a field telephone. Although the Germans had many times more radios than the Soviets, they relied overwhelmingly on wire communications.



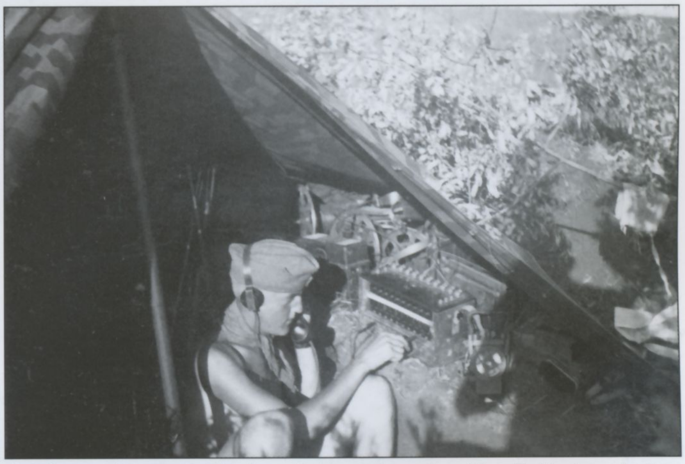
Signal soldiers operating a Torn. ("Tornister") Fu.b1 tactical radio. This high frequency radio was developed by Lorenz in 1935-36. It had a range of approximately 2km, or up to nearly 3km in perfect conditions.

Two NCOs watch as soldier strings wire from a spool strapped to his back. A large number of Wehrmacht soldiers were employed laying and recovering telephone wire.

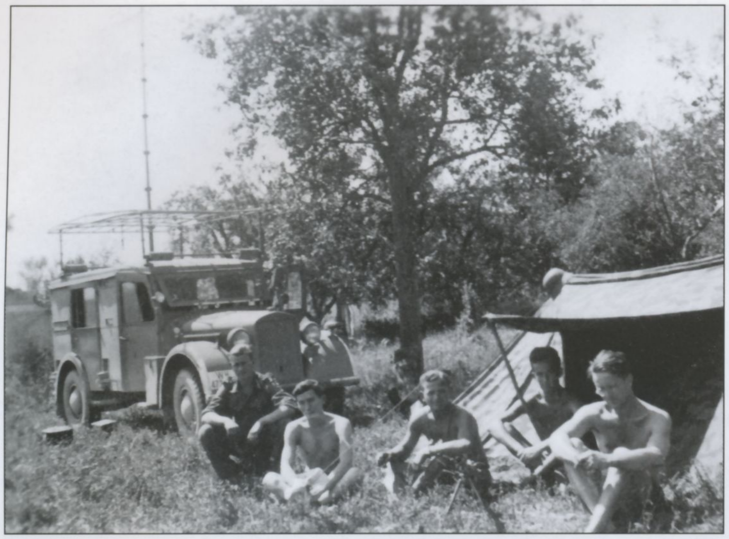




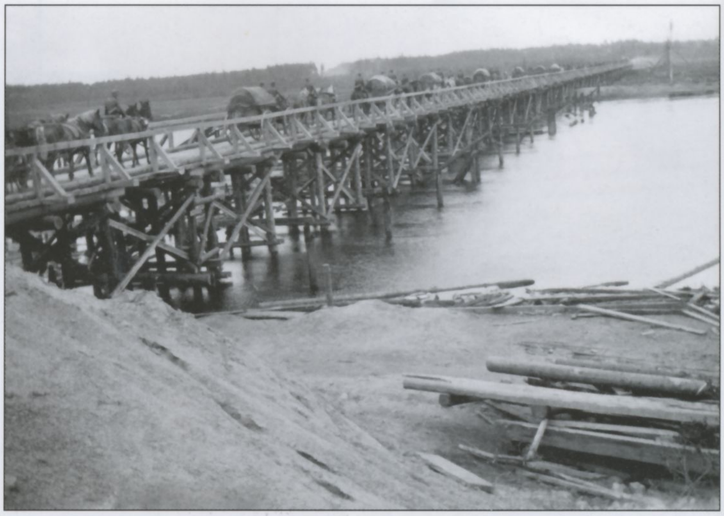
An NCO leans over Torn.Fu.b1 while a *Gefreiter* operates the radio, both men wear signal troops qualification badges on their sleeves. The Torn.Fu.b1 was made up of three parts: Receiver (top left) and receiver (top right) and power supply (bottom).



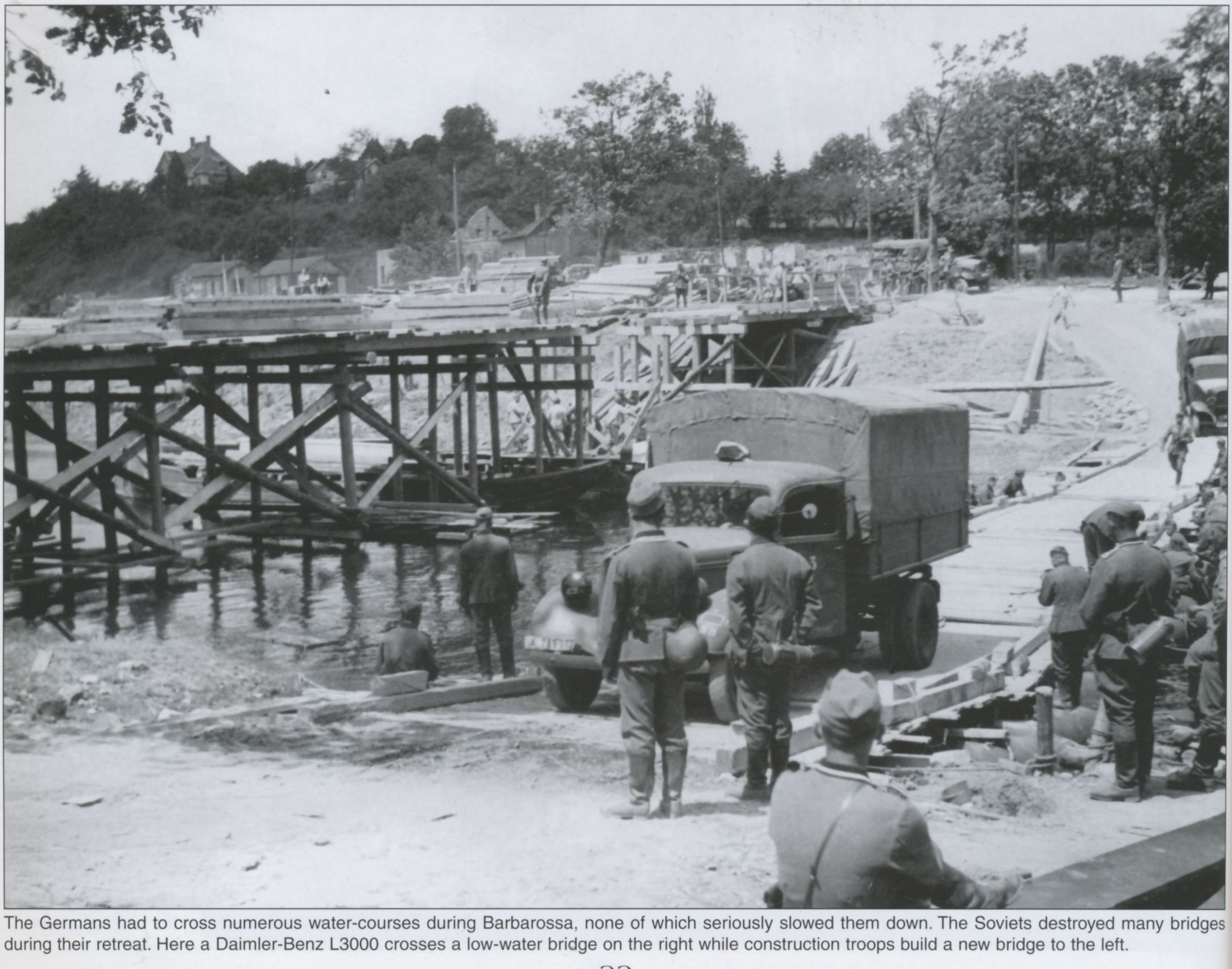
Soldier using a tactical switchboard under his *Zeltbahn* shelter. Numerous wire spools are in the background.



Mobile field communications outpost including truck with built-up compartment and antenna.

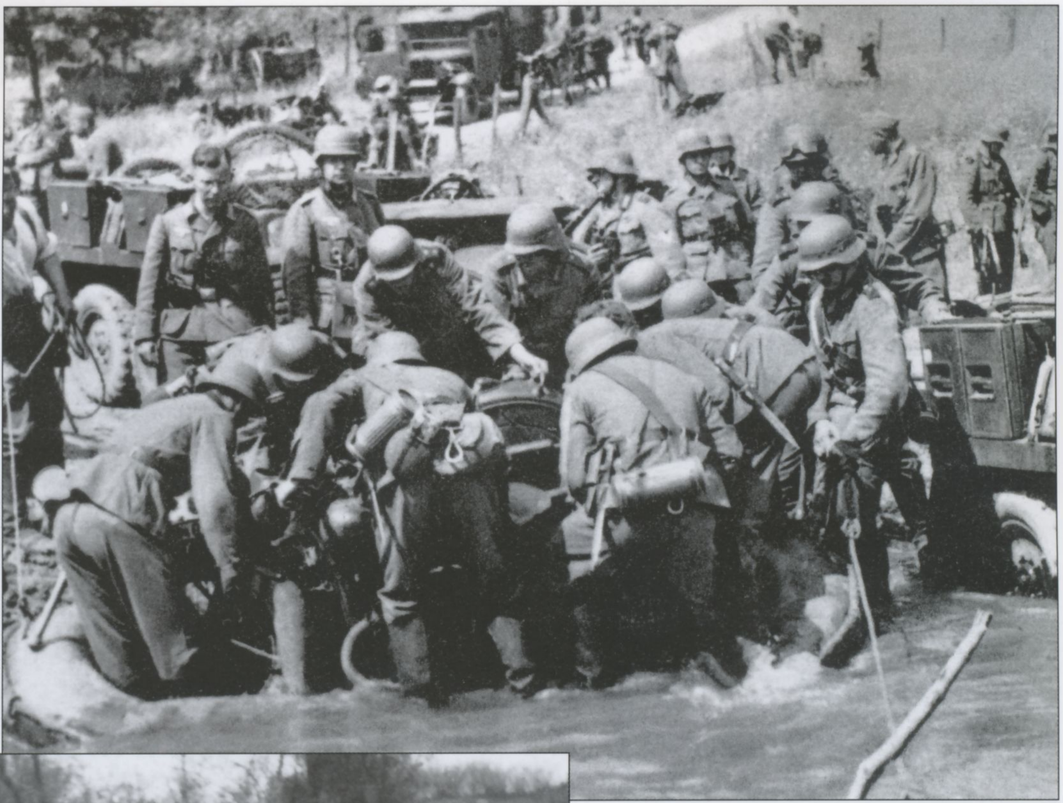


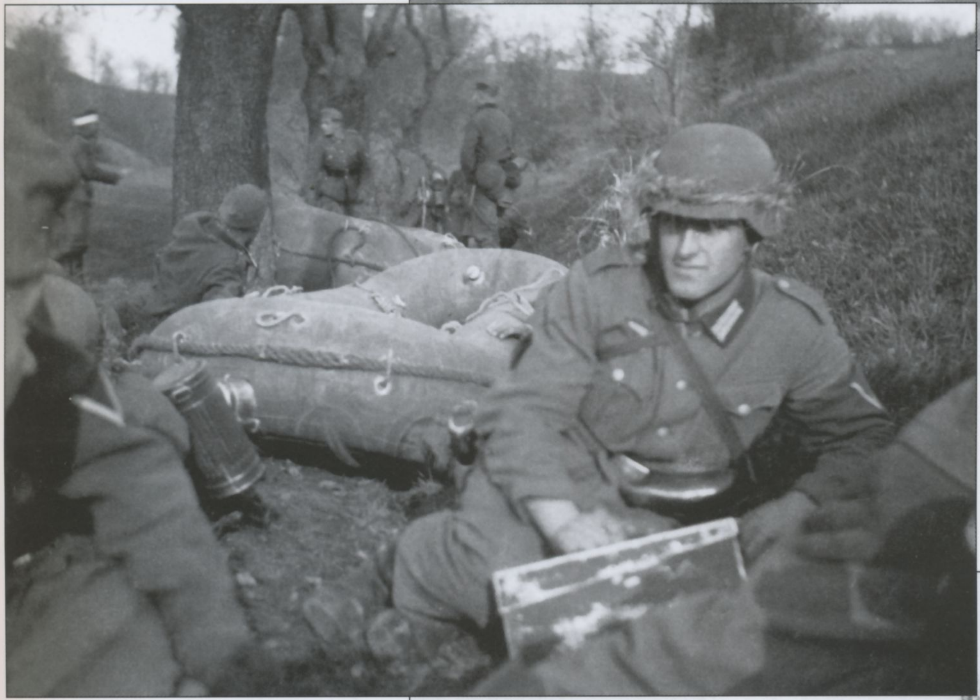
Newly built German bridge across a decent-sized river. Each German corps, army and army group had bridge-building columns attached.



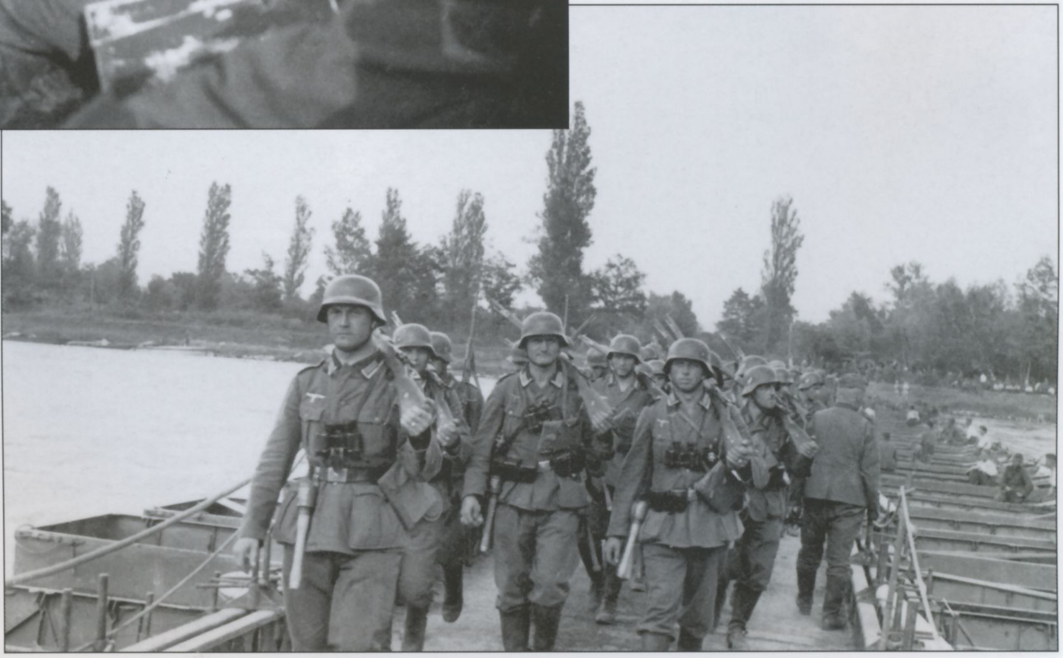
The Germans had to cross numerous water-courses during Barbarossa, none of which seriously slowed them down. The Soviets destroyed many bridges during their retreat. Here a Daimler-Benz L3000 crosses a low-water bridge on the right while construction troops build a new bridge to the left.

At what seems to be a rather cluttered bridgehead, German soldiers try to load a heavy piece of equipment aboard a rubber assault boat. Their work does not seem to be going well.



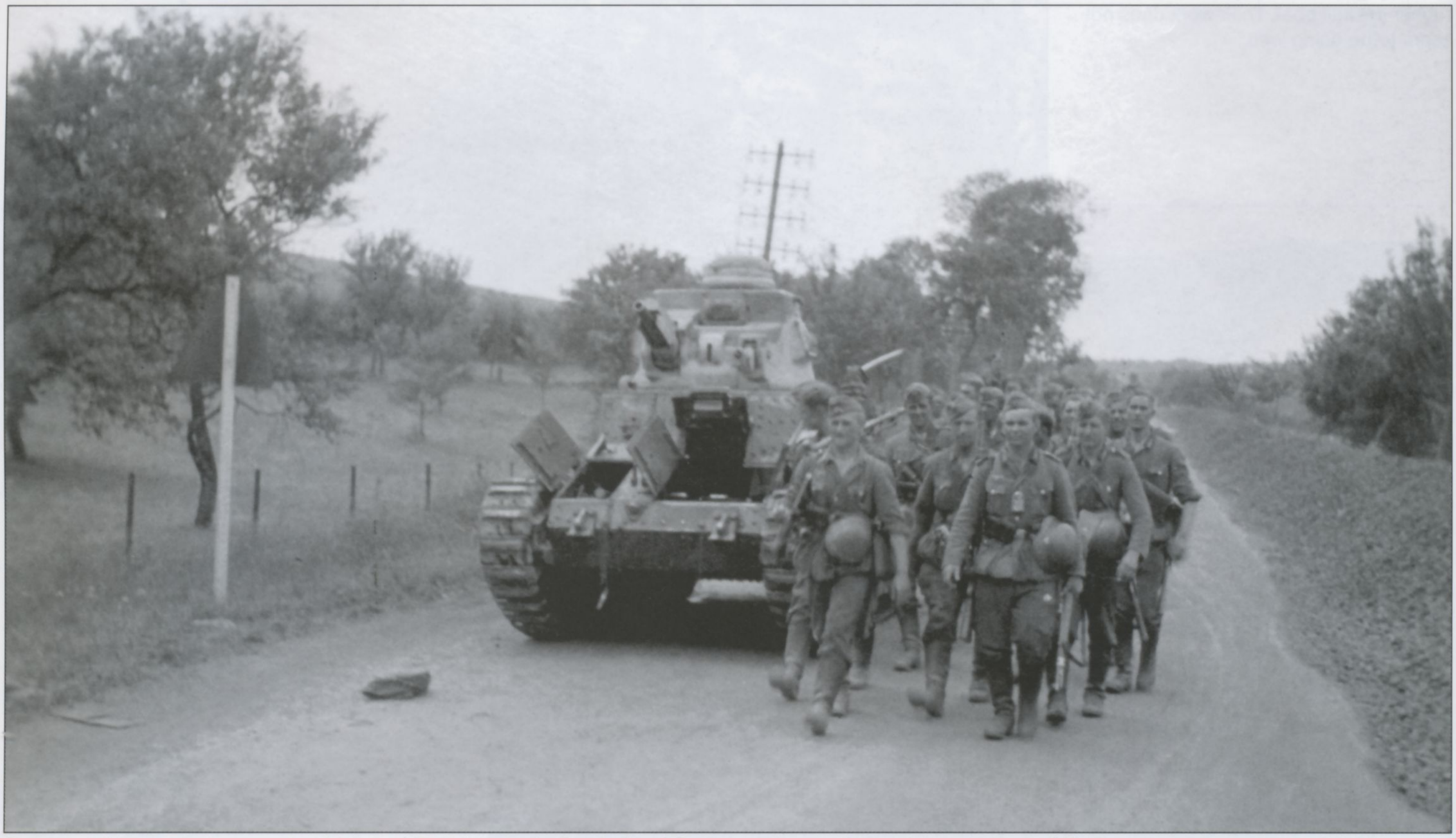


A group of Germans and two *kleiner Flossack* assault boats, each of which can hold six to eight men.

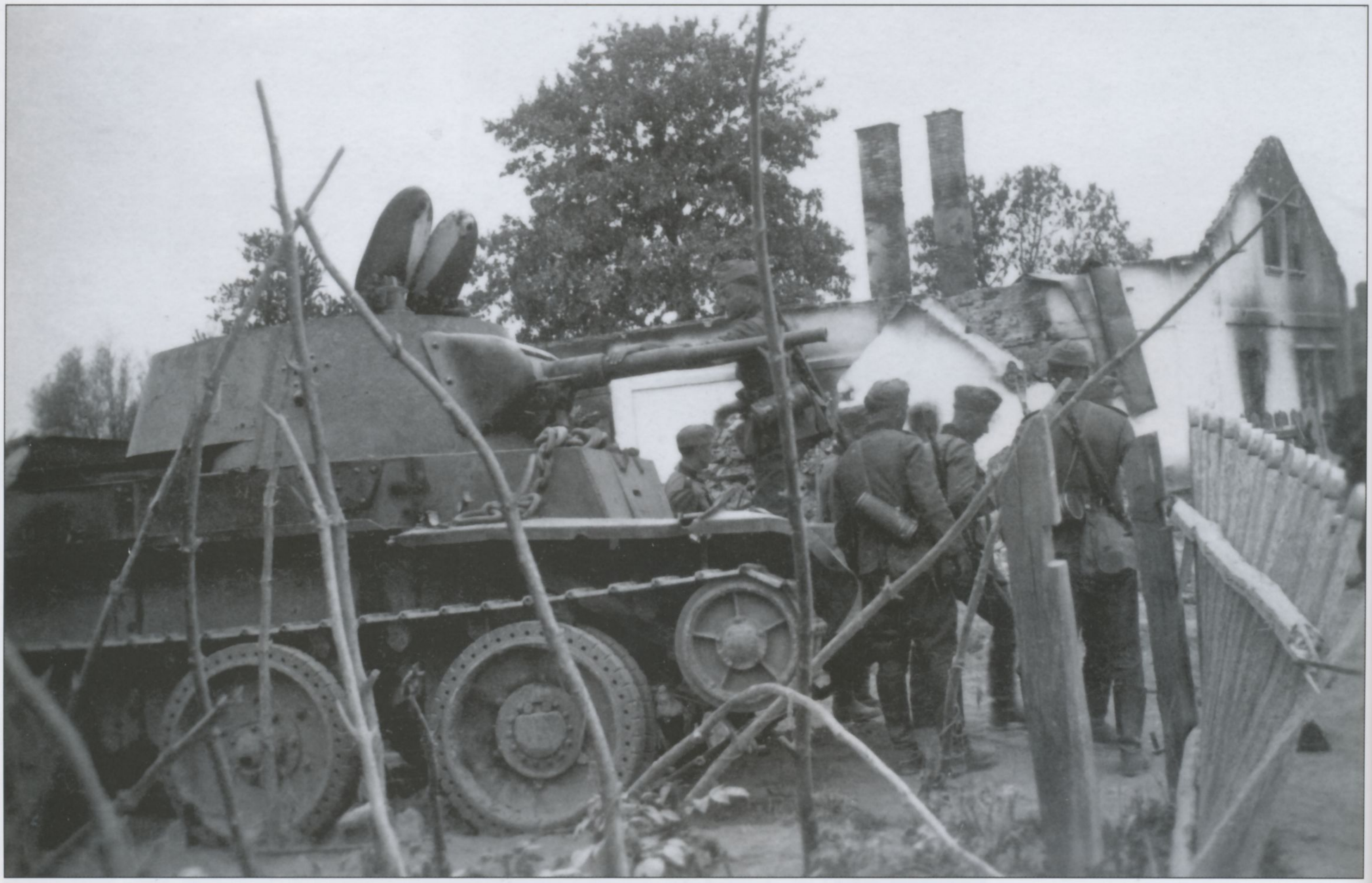


Three NCOs lead the way across a 4-ton capacity pontoon bridge. The roadbed is laid across "*B-Brückengerät*" (boats).

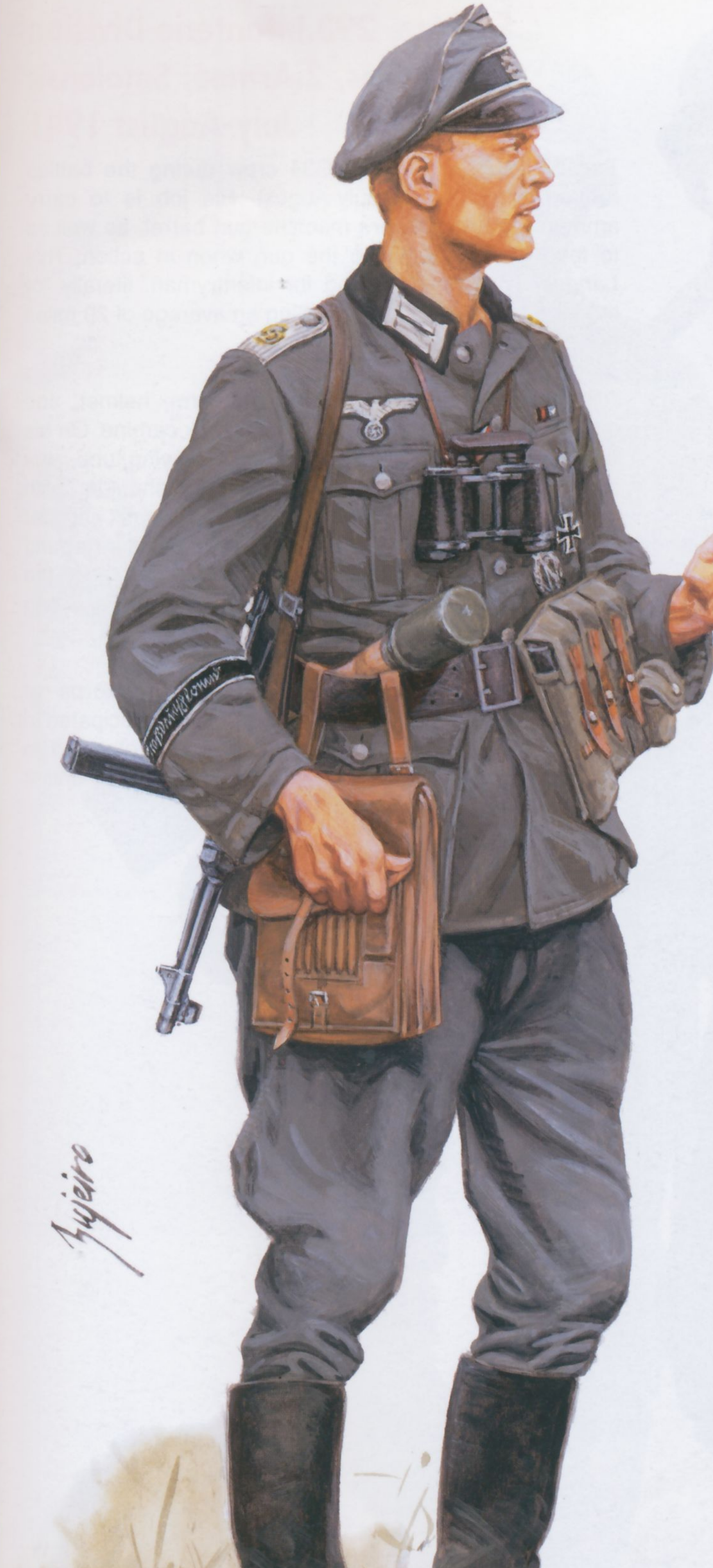
Destroyed Soviet Armor and Equipment



German soldiers march around a destroyed T-18 light tank. Symbolic of Soviet weakness during the early days of Barbarossa, this unsuccessful design was among the Red Army's first. Based on the French Renault, the 6-ton tank mounted a 37mm gun.



Abandoned 14-ton BT-7 "Fast Cavalry Tank." A fully loaded BT-7 carried 145 main-gun rounds. Most tanks of this type had disappeared by 1942.



Leutnant
Infanterie-Regt Großdeutschland
Panzergruppe 2
Minsk, July 1941

One of the elite units in the German Army, *Großdeutschland* (Greater Germany) took its name from the fact that its soldiers came from all over the country rather than a single district (*Wehrkreis*) like the rest of the army. While a full battalion remained in a barracks in Berlin/Moabit Germany to provide security for the Berlin government, by far the bulk of the regiment was engaged in combat. During the course of the war, *Großdeutschland* grew from a regiment to a Panzerkorps.

This *Leutnant* wears a typical officer's uniform that includes a crushed peaked cap and a two-pronged belt buckle. He is armed with a stick grenade and machine pistol (with its distinctive ammo pouches on his belt). A *Melderkartentasche* (dispatch case) is hung on his right hip and he has standard 6x30 binoculars around his neck. He has already received the Iron Cross 1st Class and Infantry Assault Badge.

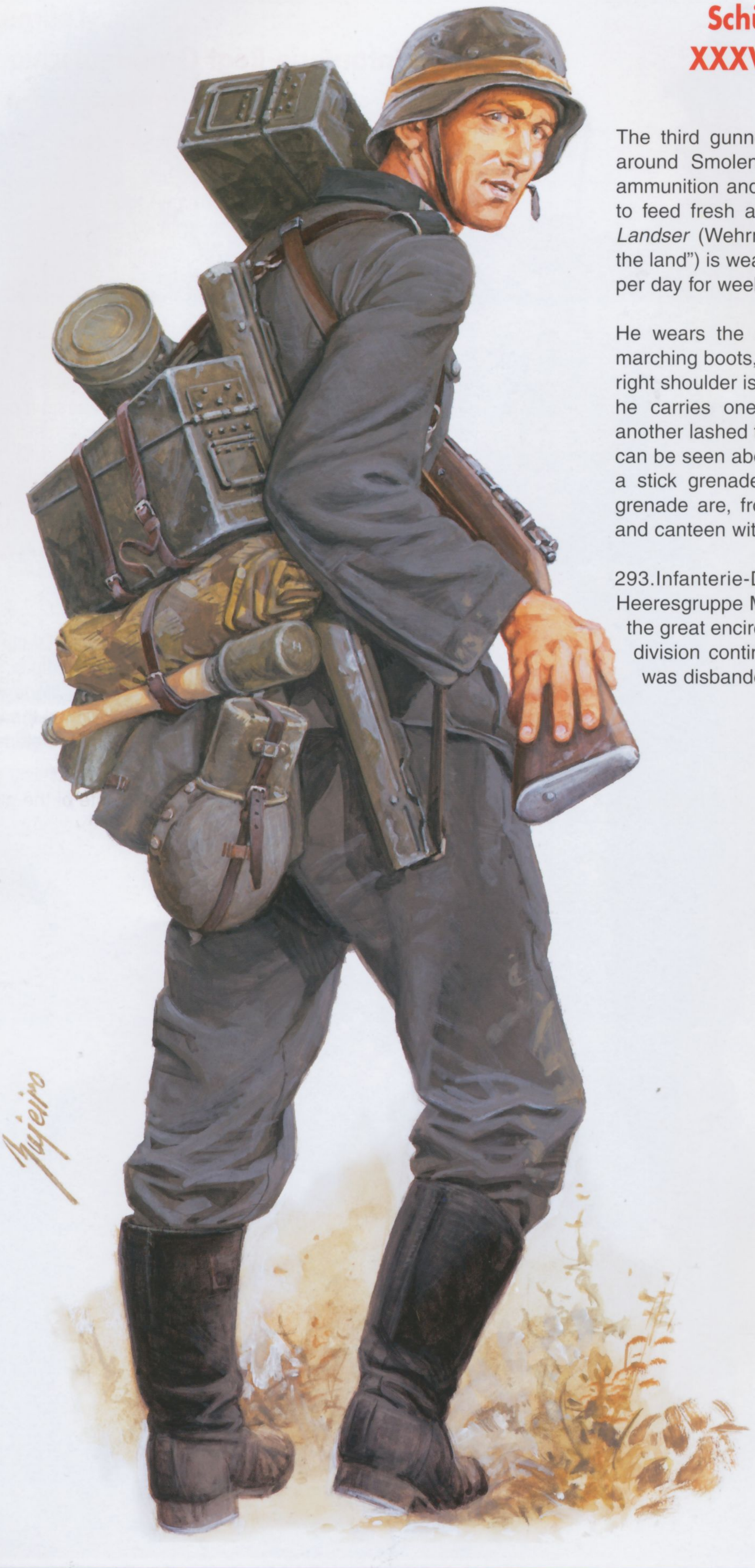
Insignia unique to *Großdeutschland* are the "GD" cipher on his shoulder straps and the cuff title in Sütterlin script. During this phase of Barbarossa, *Großdeutschland* was part of Guderian's Panzergruppe 2 in the central theater, taking part in the Minsk and Smolensk encirclement battles in the first month of the campaign.

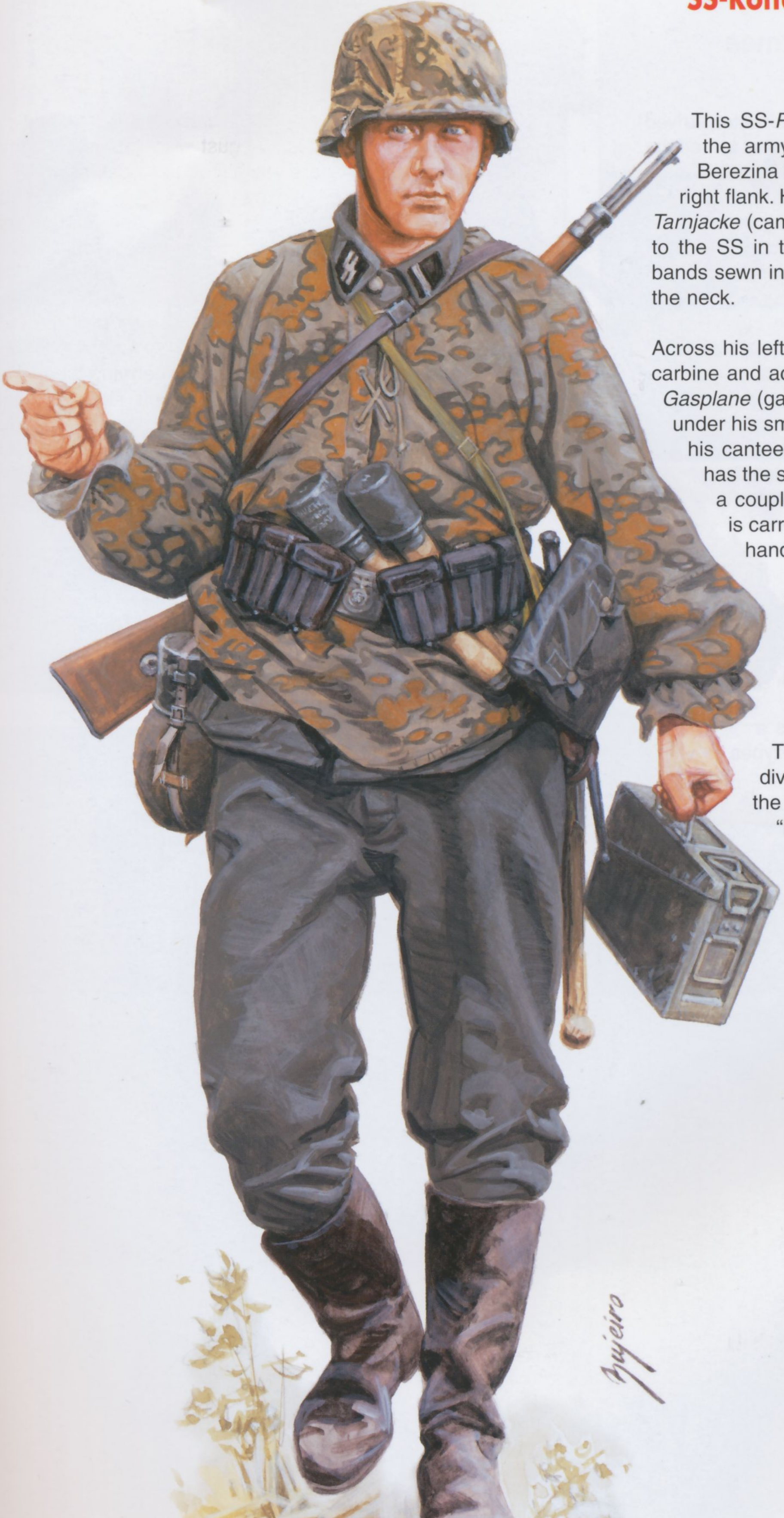
Schütze, 293.Infanterie-Division XXXV.Korps, 2.Armee, Smolensk July-August 1941

The third gunner of an MG34 crew during the battles around Smolensk in July-August. His job is to carry ammunition and a spare machine-gun barrel, as well as to feed fresh ammo into the gun when in action. This *Landser* (Wehrmacht slang for infantryman, literally "of the land") is weary after marching an average of 20 miles per day for weeks.

He wears the standard feldgrau uniform, helmet, and marching boots, plus he carries a Kar98k carbine. On his right shoulder is the spare barrel in its carrying tube, plus he carries one ammo box on his left shoulder with another lashed to his assault pack. His gasmask canister can be seen above the pack, and his shelter-quarter and a stick grenade are below the ammo box. Under the grenade are, from the left, his cooking can, bread bag and canteen with drinking cup.

293.Infanterie-Division belonged to XXXV.Korps of Heeresgruppe Mitte. During Barbarossa it participated in the great encirclement battles like that at Smolensk. The division continued to fight in the central sector until it was disbanded in November 1943.





SS-Rottenführer, SS Division “Reich”

Panzergruppe 2

August 1941

This SS-*Rottenführer* (corporal, or *Obergefreiter* in the army) is taking part in the fighting for the Berezina River bridgehead on Heeresgruppe Mitte’s right flank. His most unusual uniform item is the Type I *Tarnjacke* (camouflage smock) and helmet cover, unique to the SS in this early phase of the war. It has elastic bands sewn in at the wrist and waist, plus drawstrings at the neck.

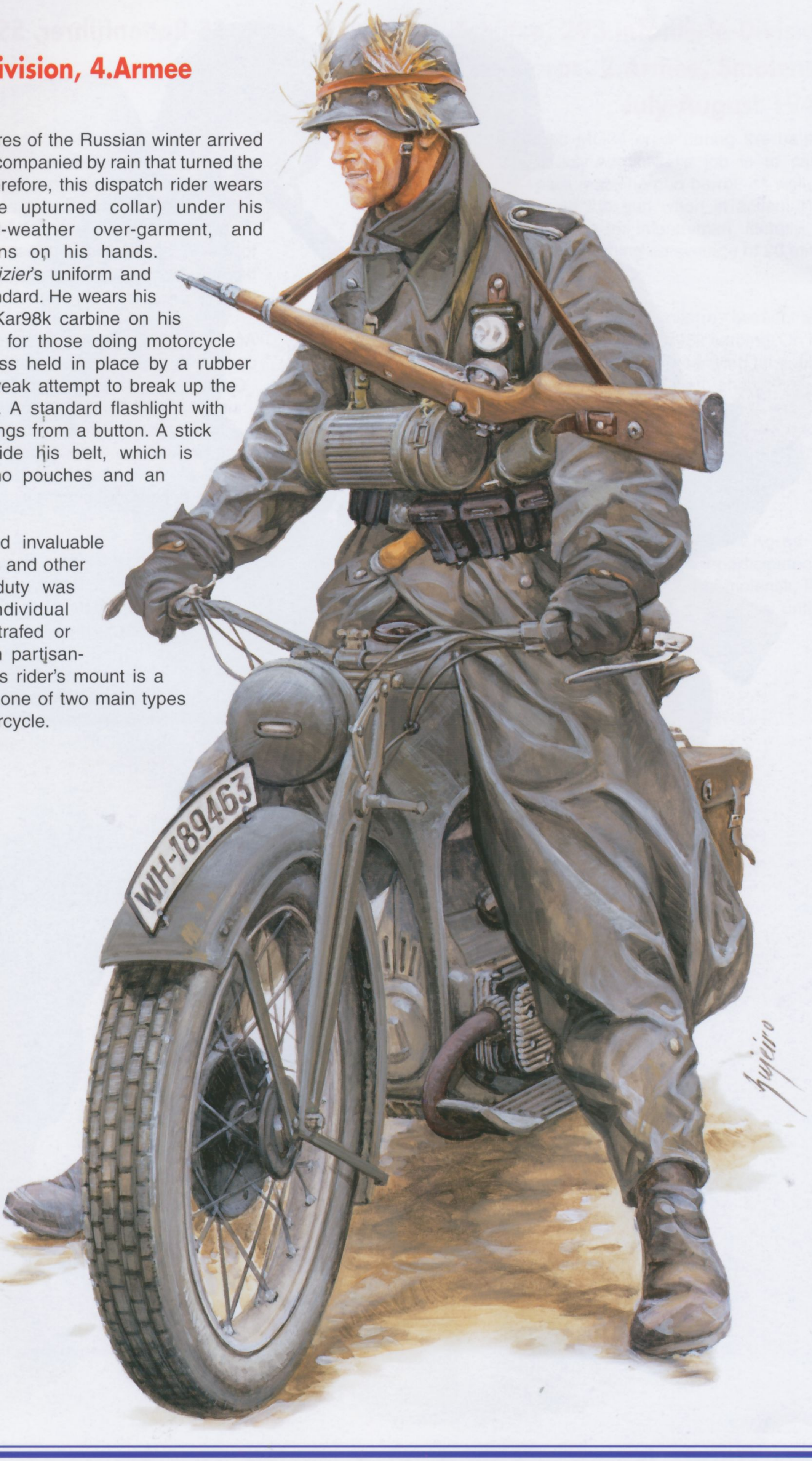
Across his left shoulder is slung the ubiquitous Kar 98k carbine and across his right shoulder is the case for his *Gasplane* (gas cape). He probably has his assault pack under his smock (as was intended) but we can still see his canteen and cup, entrenching tool and knife. He has the standard six ammo pouches on his belt and a couple of stick grenades for good measure. He is carrying an ammo can for an MG34 in his right hand.

SS Division “Reich” was formed just prior to Barbarossa from the SS *Verfügungstruppe*, and at this point was basically a motorized infantry division. In 1942 the SS renamed it “Das Reich,” and it became a Panzer grenadier division. They later reorganized it as a Panzer division. As the second numbered division of the SS, it was considered the elite of the elite. “Reich”, in its many forms, spent most of the war on the Eastern Front, but ended the war fighting in the West.

Unteroffizier
263.Infanterie-Division, 4.Armee
October 1941

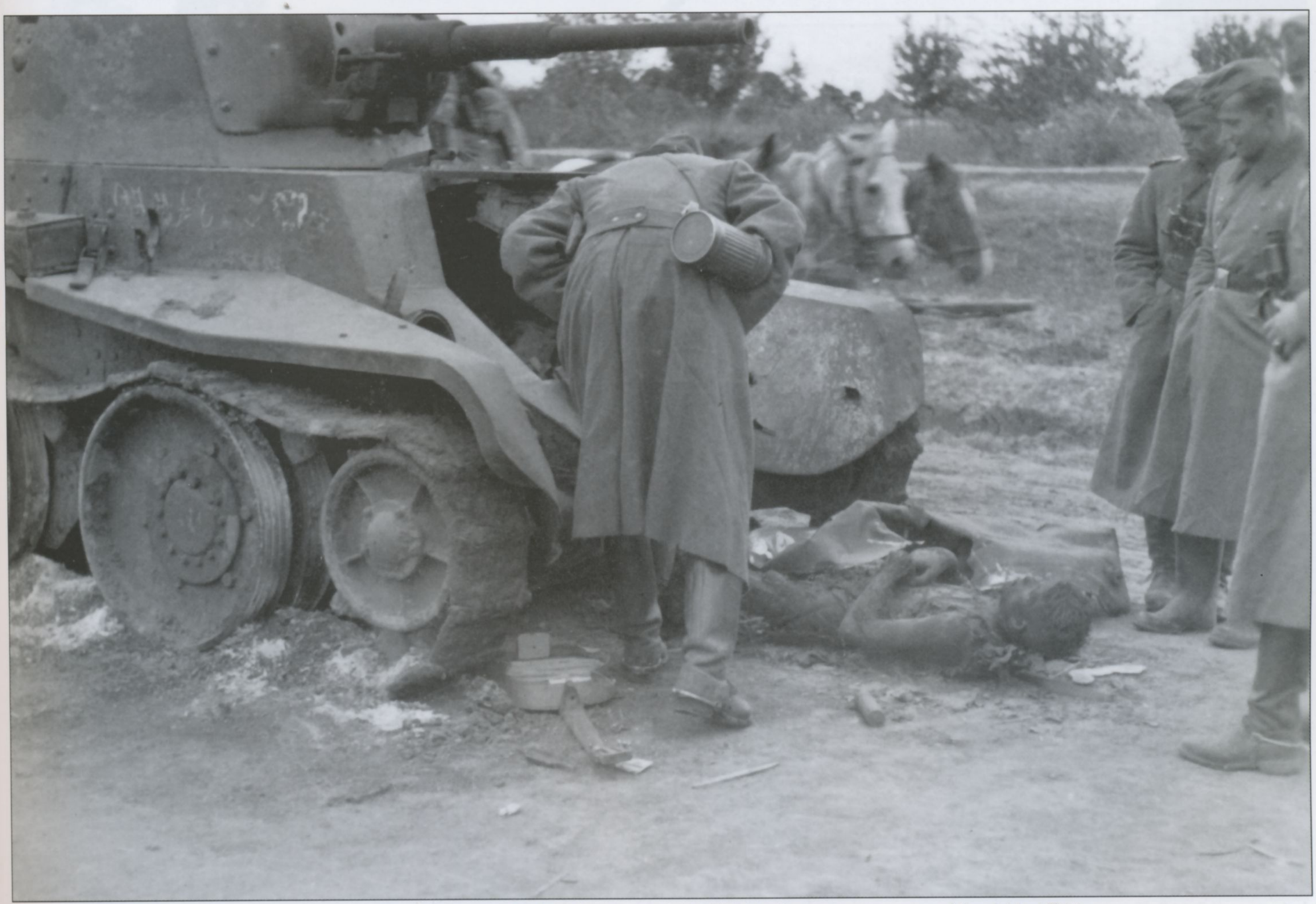
The first cold temperatures of the Russian winter arrived in mid-October, often accompanied by rain that turned the countryside to mud. Therefore, this dispatch rider wears his overcoat (note the upturned collar) under his motorcycle riders' all-weather over-garment, and motorcycle-issue mittens on his hands. Otherwise, this *Unteroffizier*'s uniform and equipment are fairly standard. He wears his gasmask canister and Kar98k carbine on his chest, as was common for those doing motorcycle duty. He has some grass held in place by a rubber camouflage band in a weak attempt to break up the silhouette of his helmet. A standard flashlight with red and green filters hangs from a button. A stick grenade is shoved inside his belt, which is adorned with rifle ammo pouches and an enlisted man's buckle.

Dispatch riders provided invaluable service delivering orders and other correspondence. This duty was very dangerous as individual riders could get lost, strafed or ambushed (especially in partisan-infested rear areas). This rider's mount is a 750cc Zündapp KS750, one of two main types of German military motorcycle.

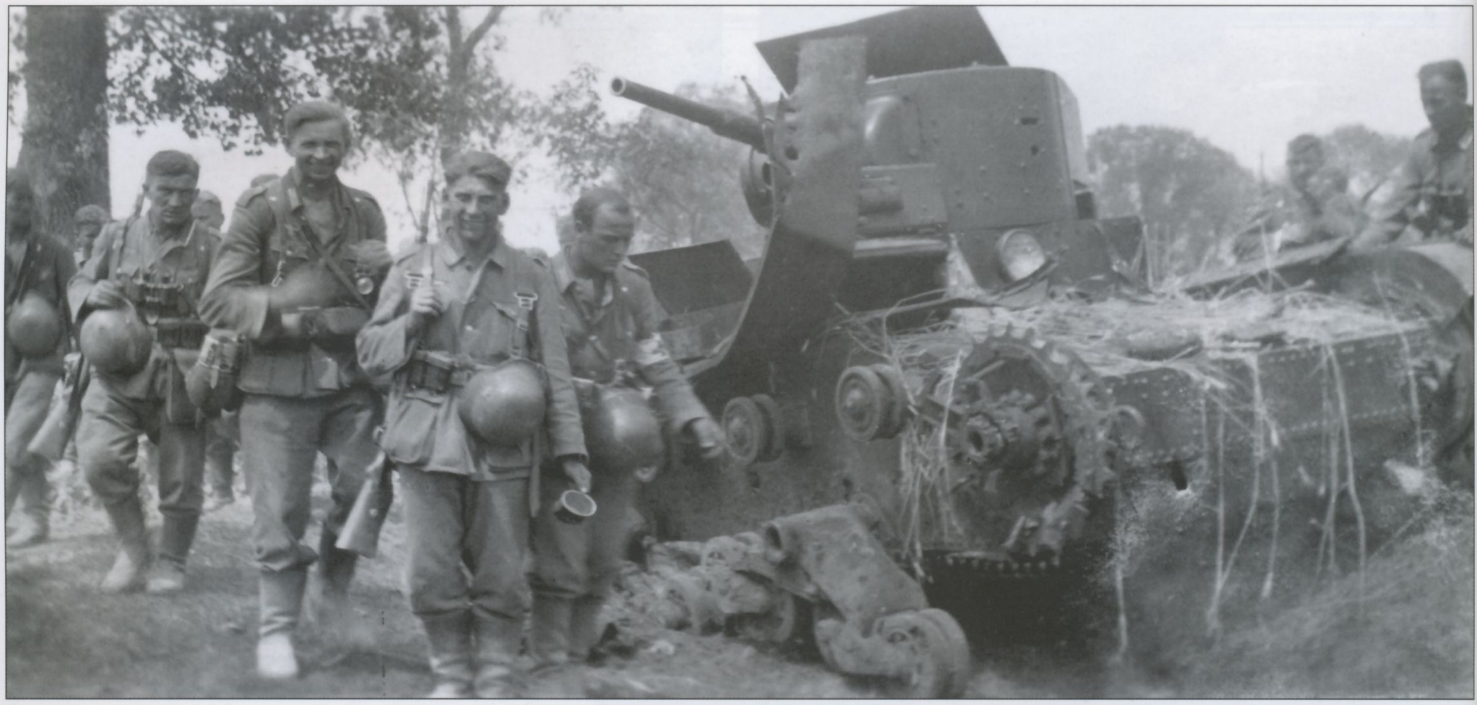


Krupp L2H43 "Schnautzer" (left) and a destroyed BT-7 tank (center), attracting the attention of some Germans. Meanwhile a signalman works atop a telephone pole.

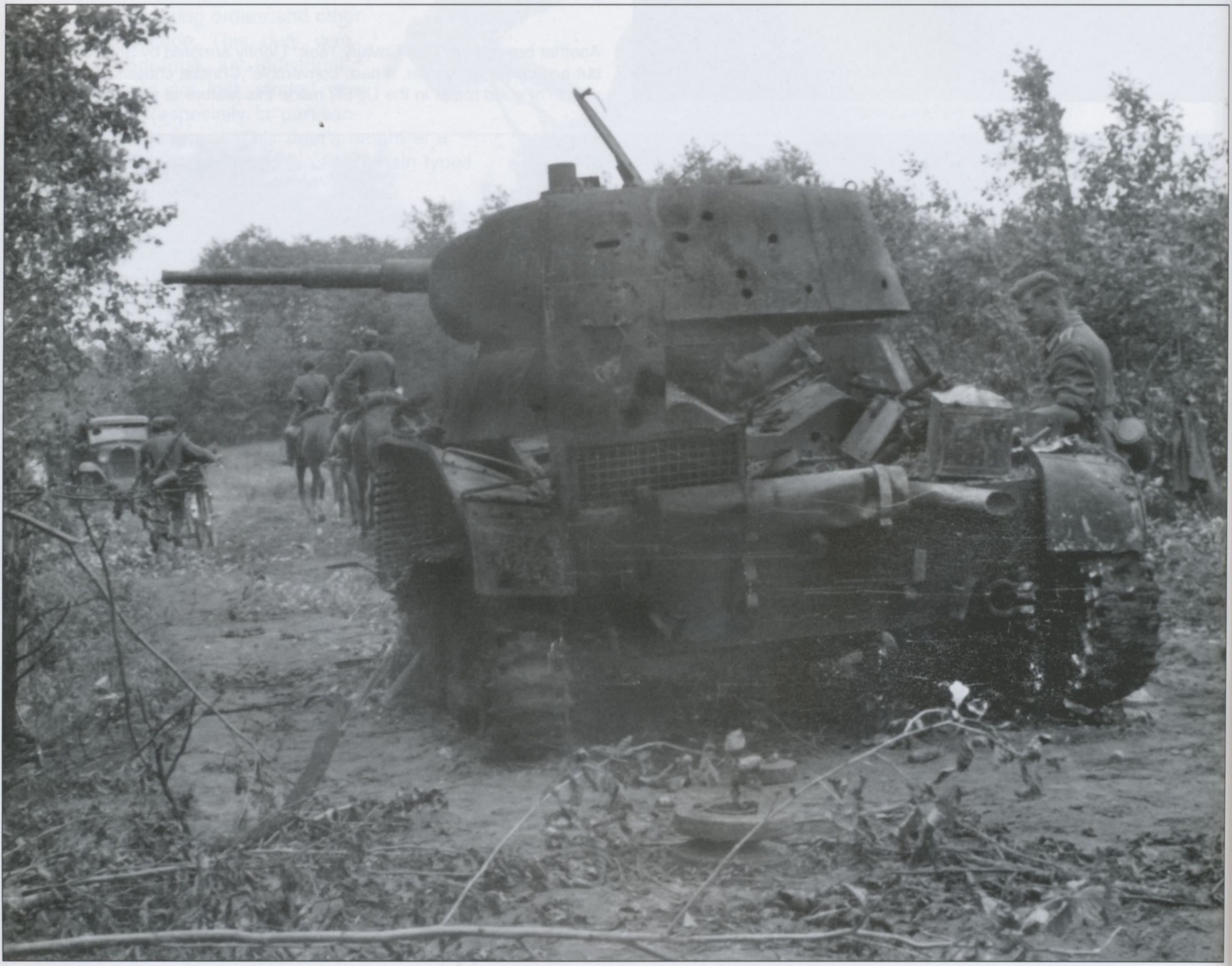
Another brewed-up "Fast Cavalry Tank." Lightly armored by Soviet standards, but equivalent to Panzer, it had "convertible" Christie chassis. However, the dearth of good roads in the USSR made this feature of doubtful value.



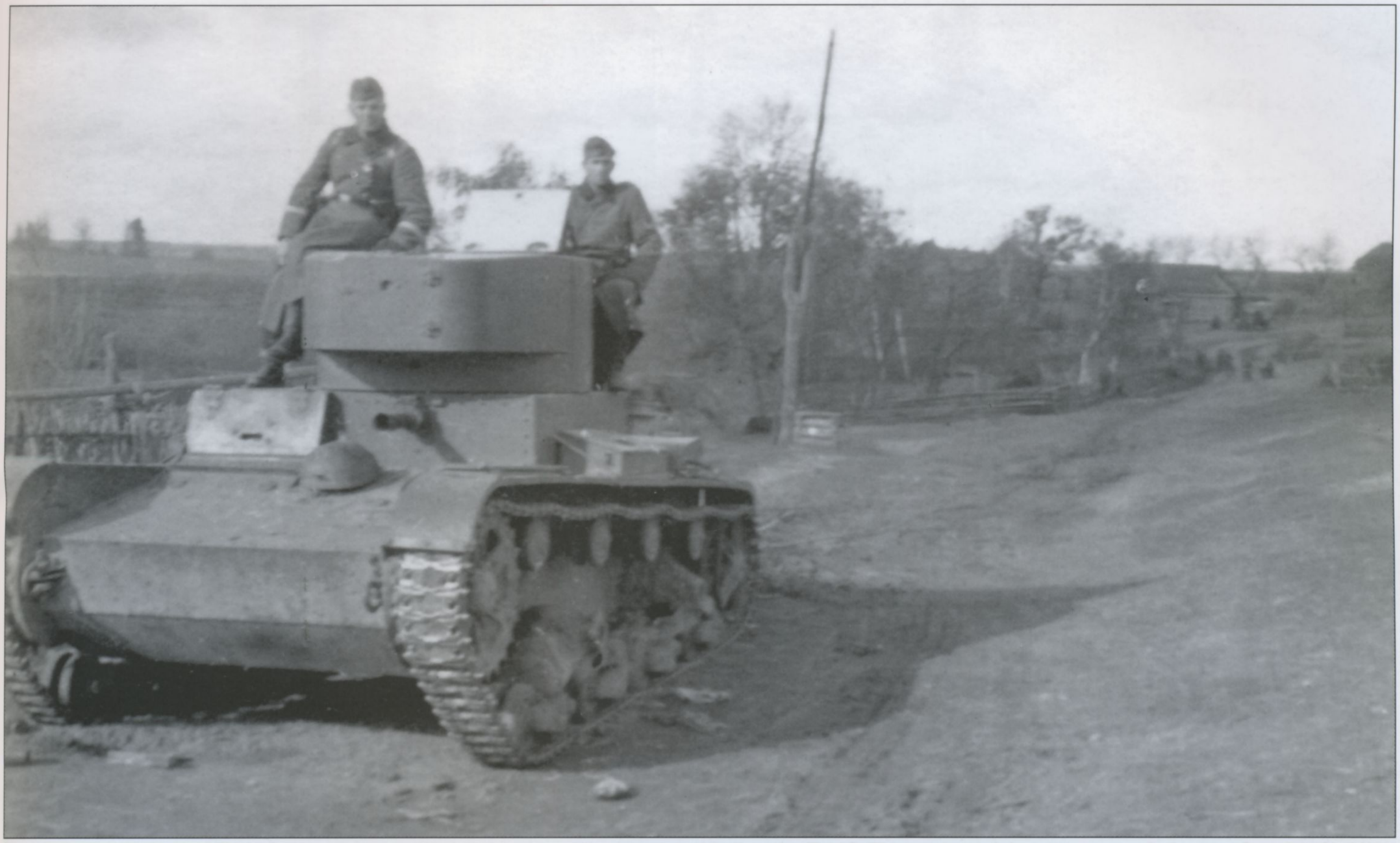
Sitting in the very front of his tank, this immolated driver never stood a chance. The BT-7 tank was a precursor of the fabled T-34.



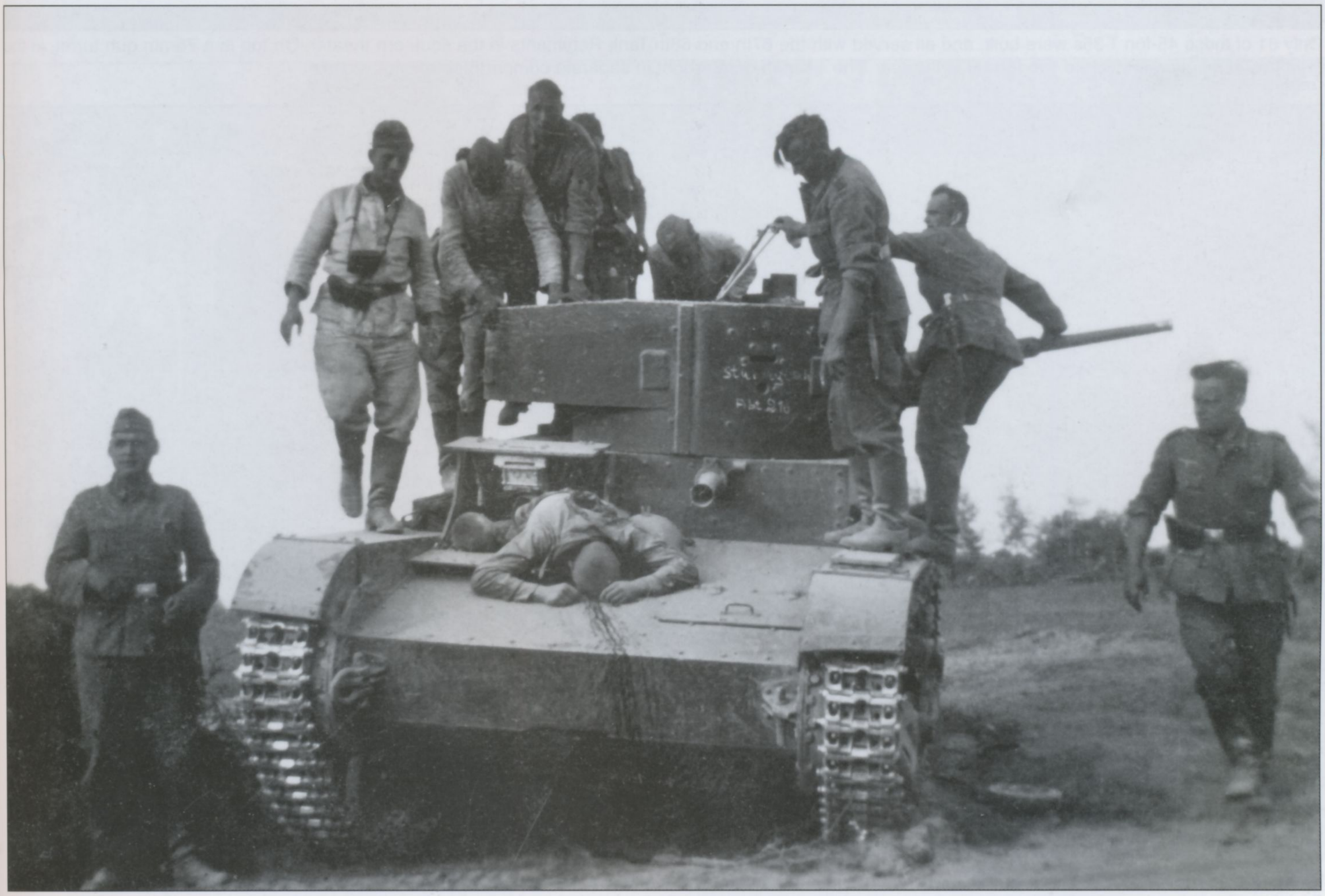
German soldiers, including a medic (center) pass a brewed-up T-26 light tank. Based on the British 6-ton Vickers tank, this successful 1930s design made up the bulk of the Soviet tank force during Barbarossa. Over 12,000 were produced, mounting a 45mm gun.



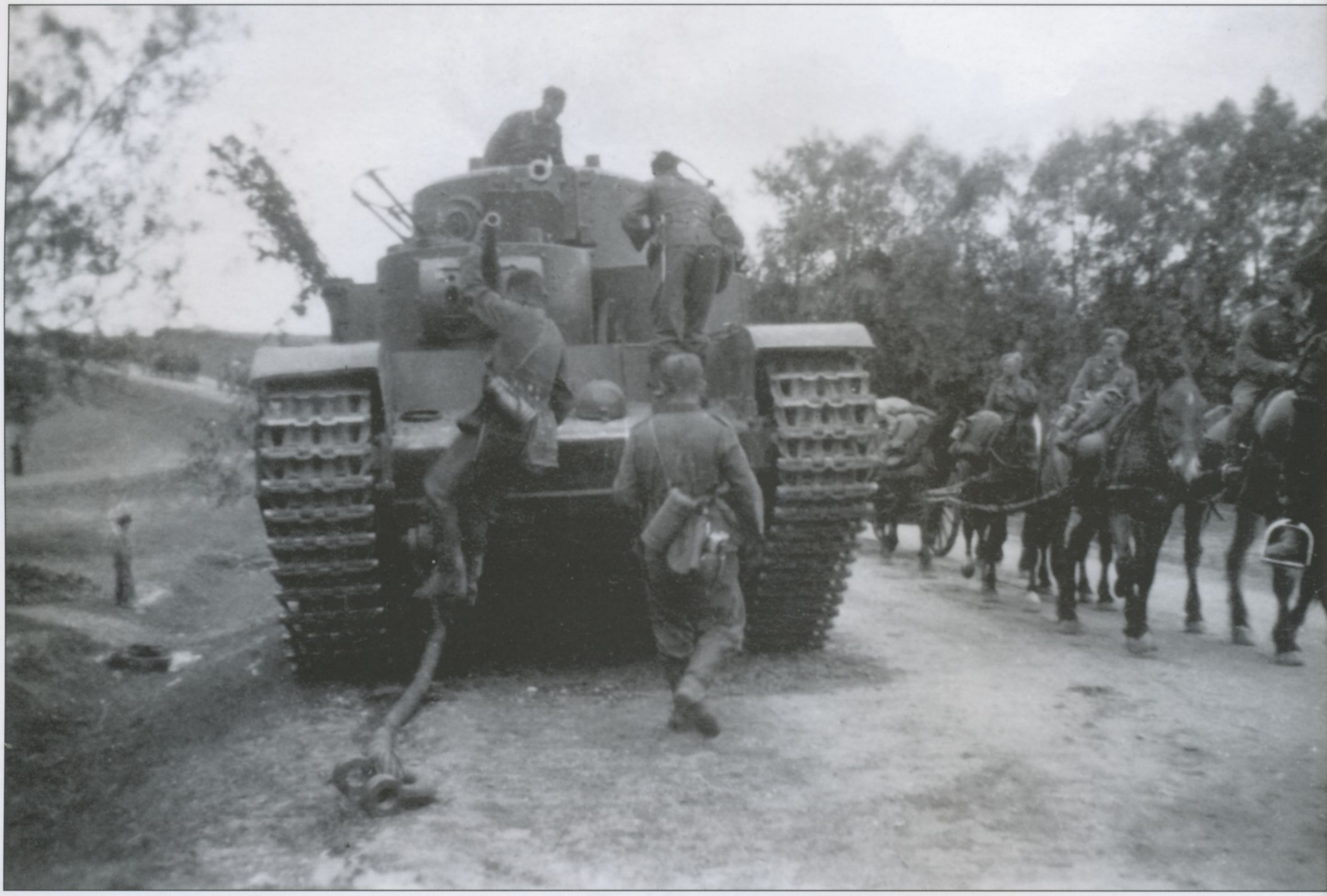
A destroyed T-26S. This was an improved version of the T-26, introduced in 1939. It had a new turret and welded, sloped hull sides.



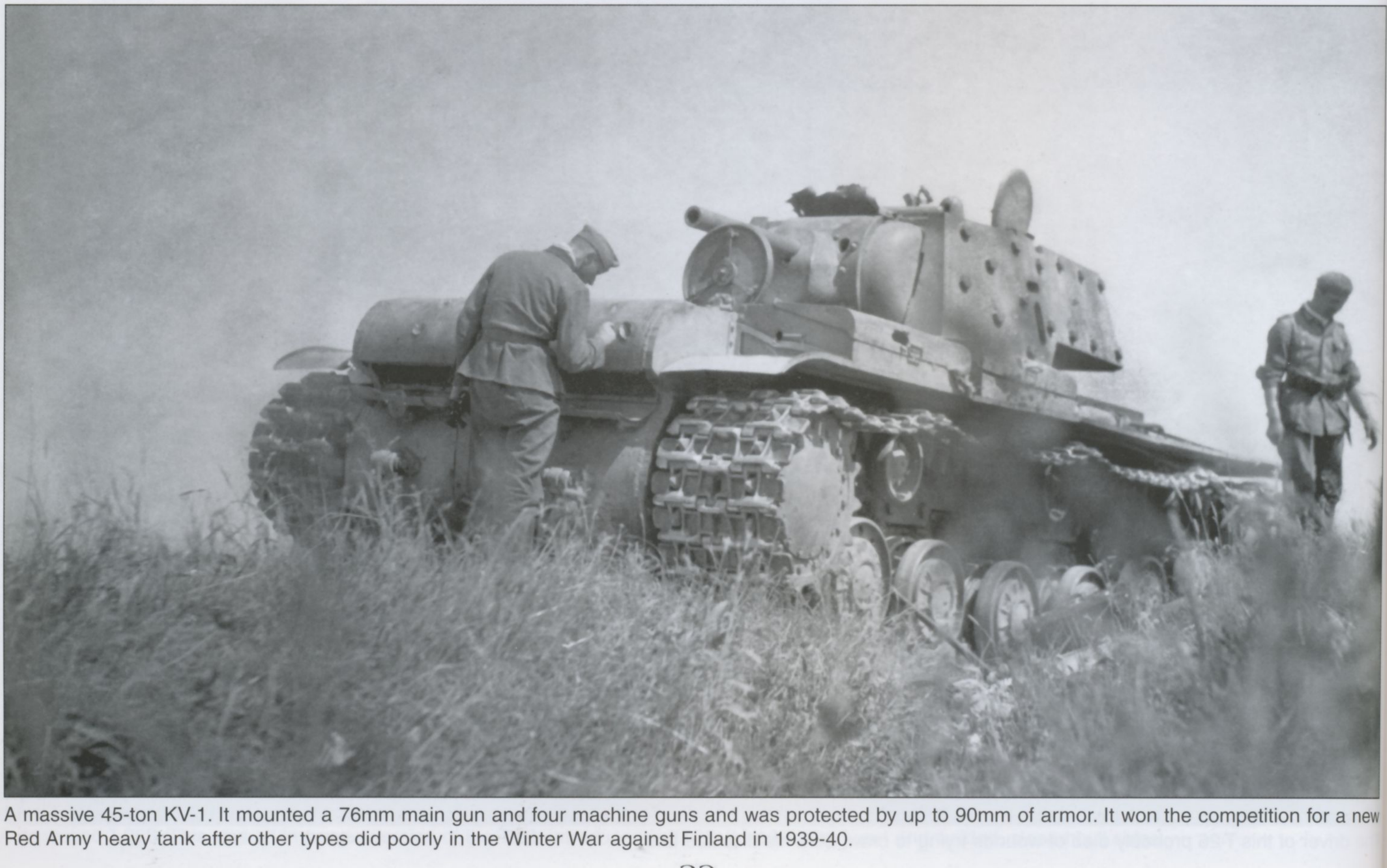
Two Germans inspect a T-26. Compare the vertical slab sides of the turret and hull to the T-26S. This tank model saw success during the Spanish Civil War and at Khalkin Gol, but was reaching obsolescence in 1941.



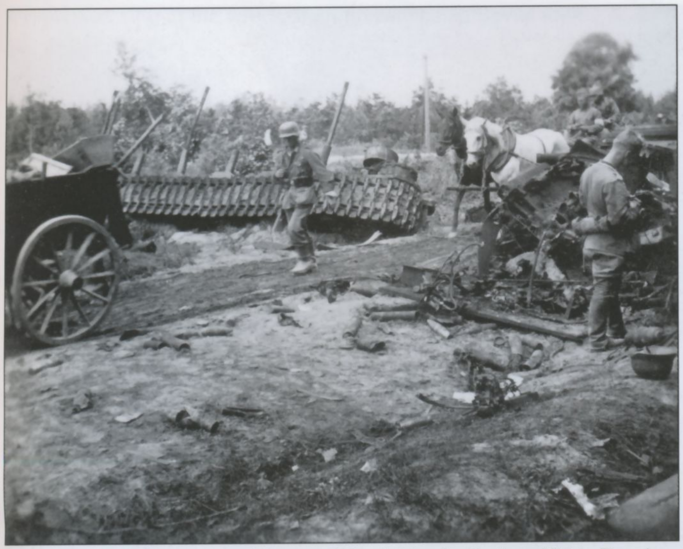
The driver of this T-26 probably died of wounds trying to crawl from his disabled tank.



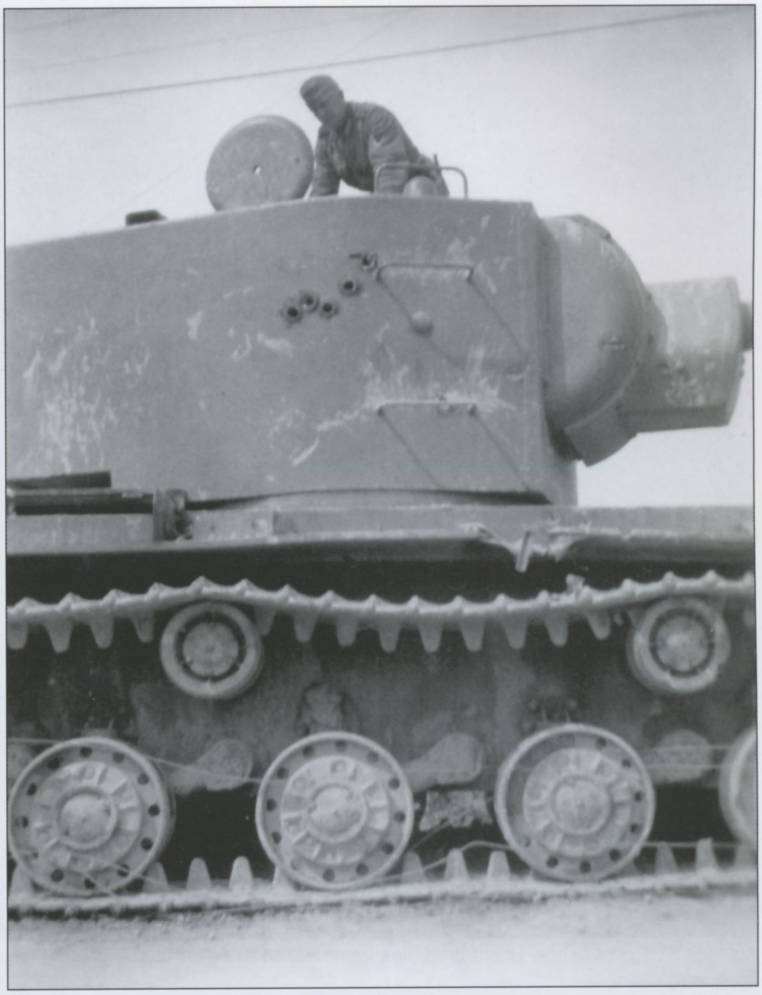
Only 61 of these 45-ton T-35s were built, and all served with the 67th and 68th Tank Regiments in the southern theater. On top is a 76mm gun turret, in the front is a 45mm gun and it had two turrets in the rear. The 11-man crew fought in separate compartments.



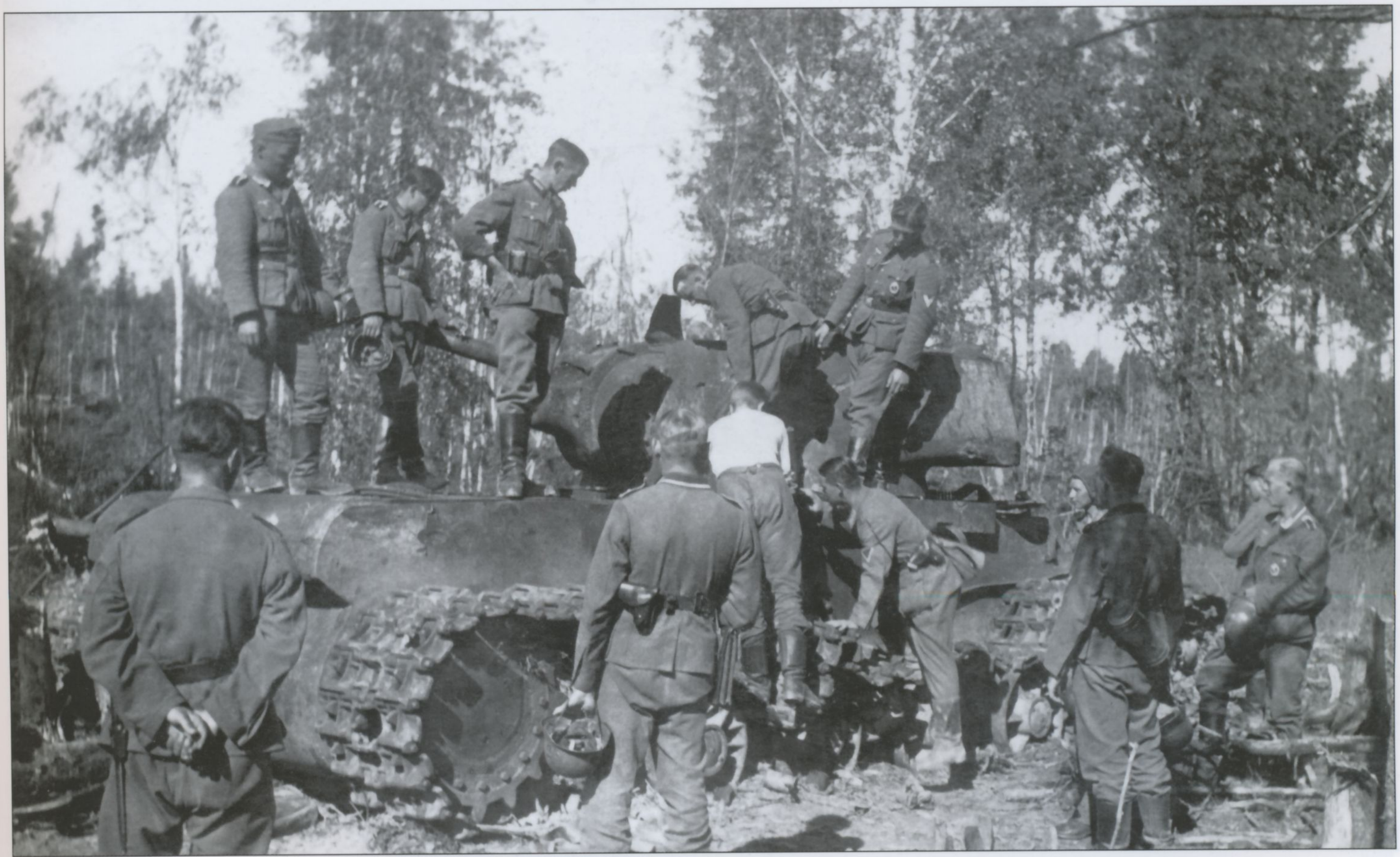
A massive 45-ton KV-1. It mounted a 76mm main gun and four machine guns and was protected by up to 90mm of armor. It won the competition for a new Red Army heavy tank after other types did poorly in the Winter War against Finland in 1939-40.



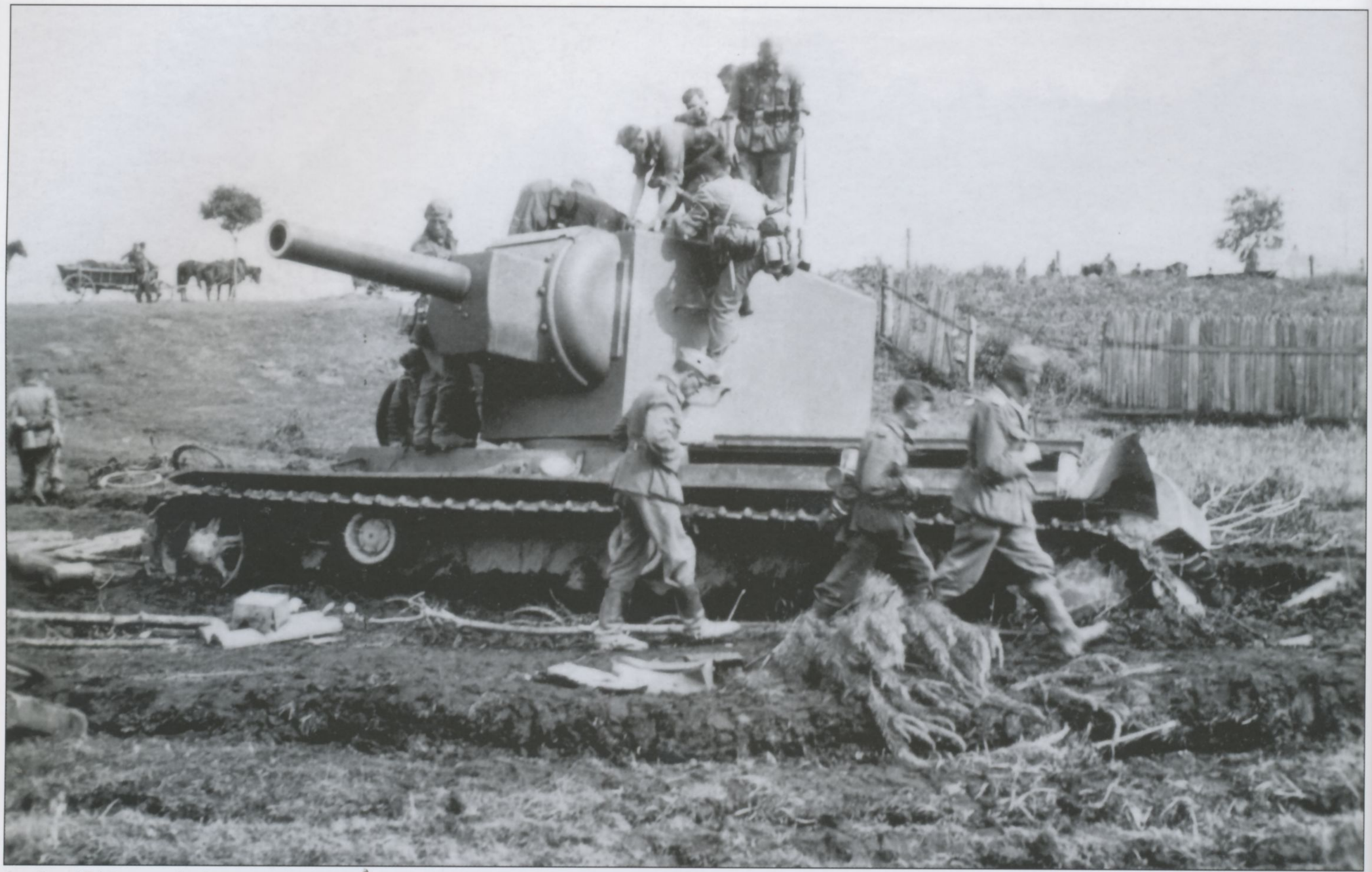
Germans march past an obliterated Soviet tank, likely a KV-1. Random torsion bars point to the sky.



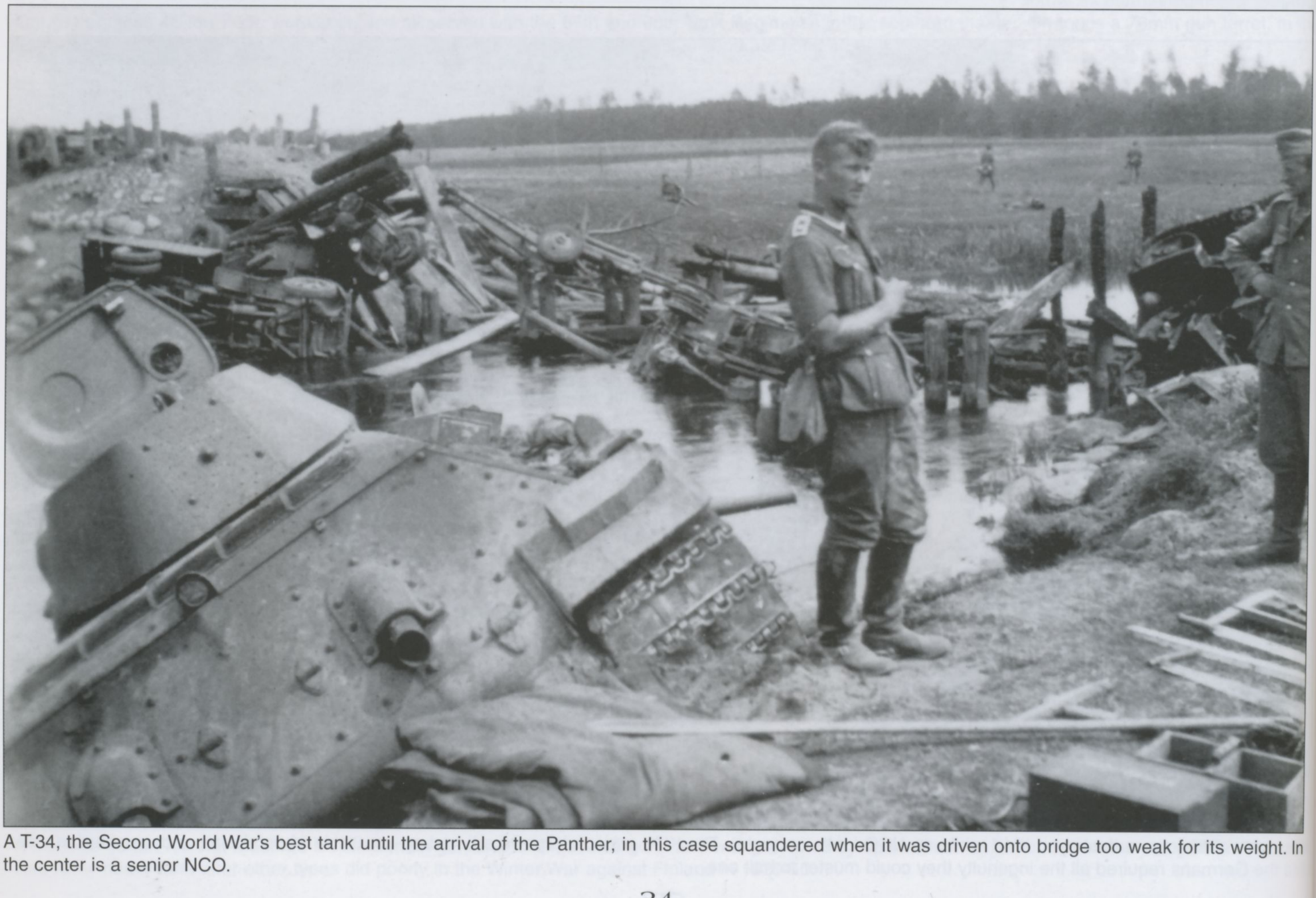
A *Gefreiter* atop the turret of a massive KV-2 infantry support tank. Its official name was "Heavy Artillery Tank," but its crews nicknamed it "the Dreadnought." This particular vehicle took at least five hits to the turret, none of which penetrated its armor.



Germans climb over a destroyed KV-1 while an NCO looks on (right). The KV-1 was underpowered, had an unreliable transmission and was hard to steer, but the Germans required all the ingenuity they could muster to halt one.

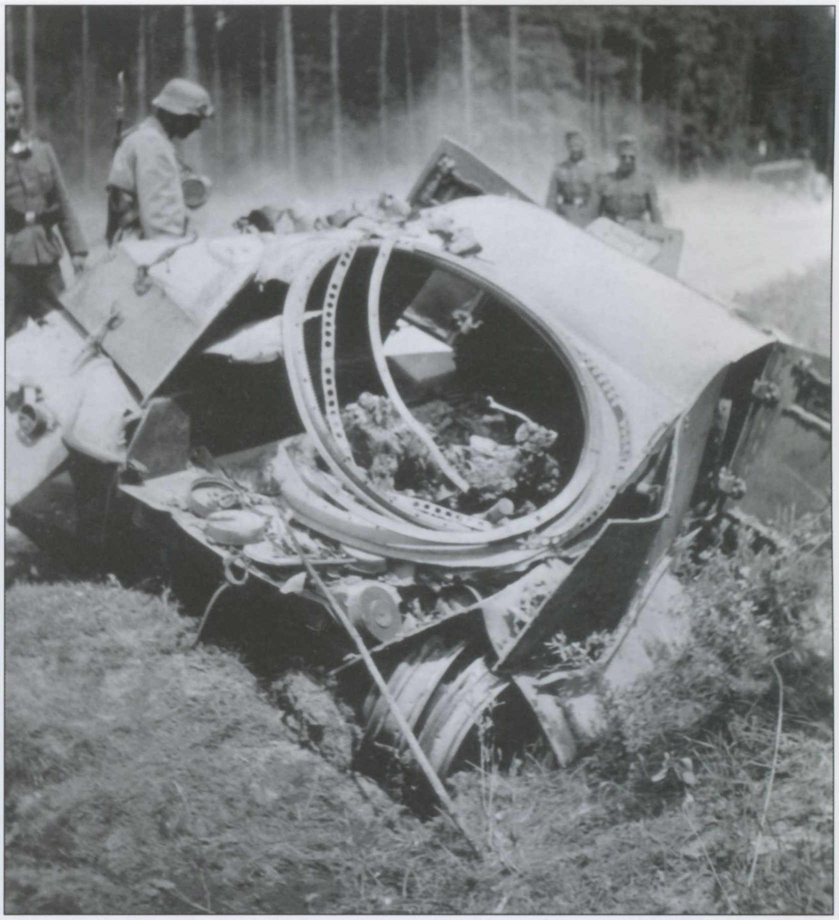


Another KV-2, seemingly unscathed, lies immobilized in soft, marshy ground where its untrained crew drove it.

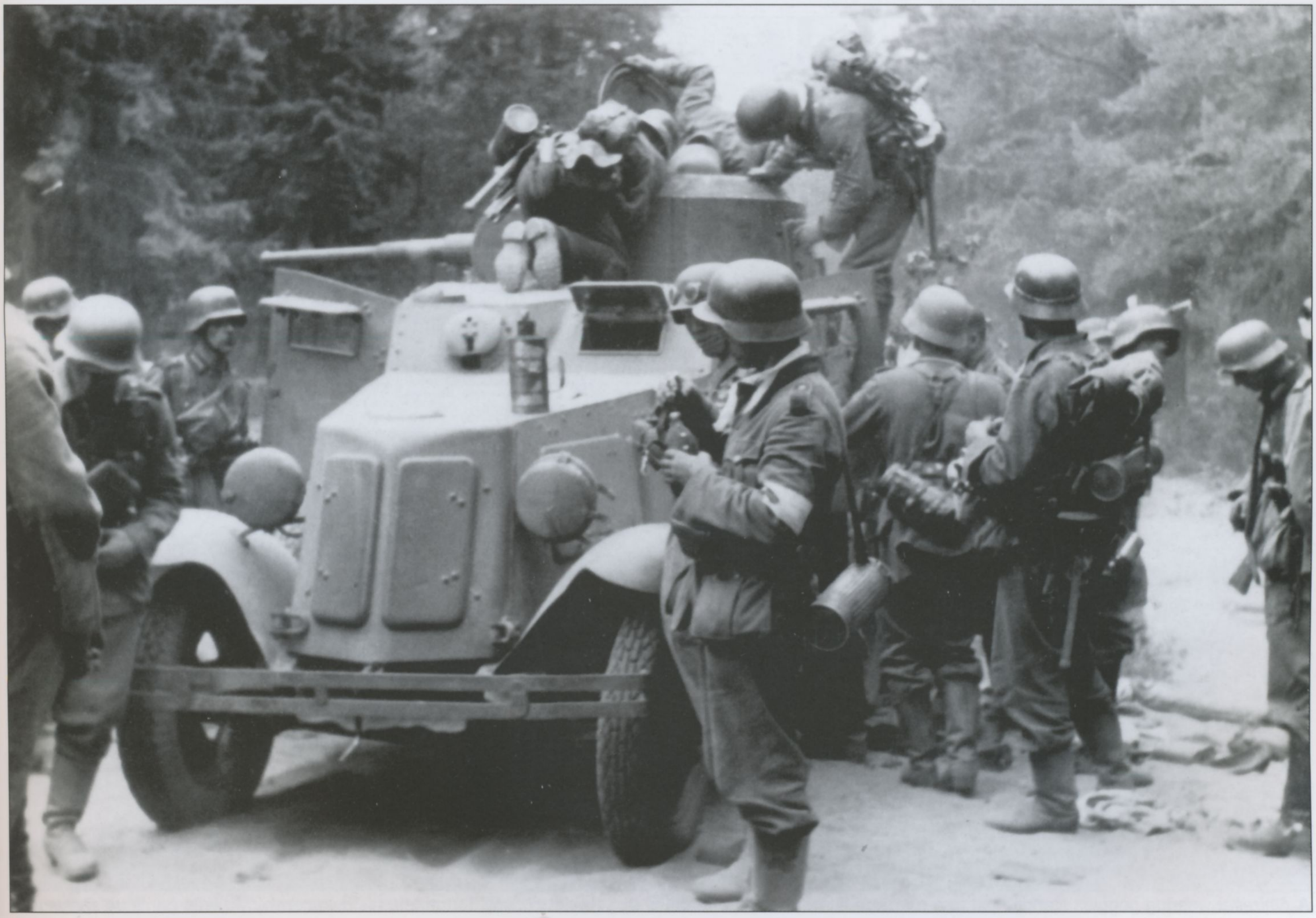


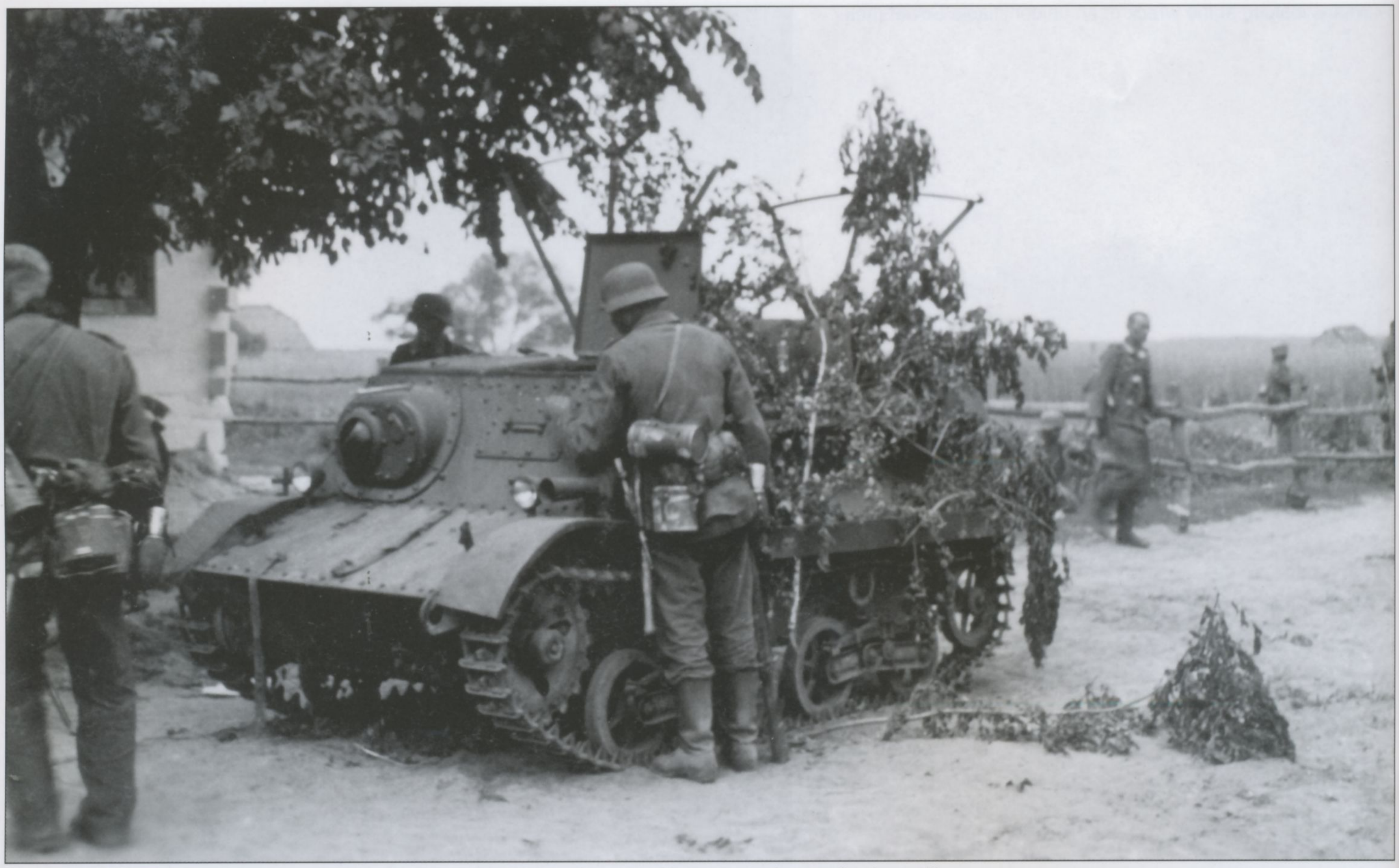
A T-34, the Second World War's best tank until the arrival of the Panther, in this case squandered when it was driven onto bridge too weak for its weight. In the center is a senior NCO.

Germans looking at the wreck of an unidentifiable Soviet tank.

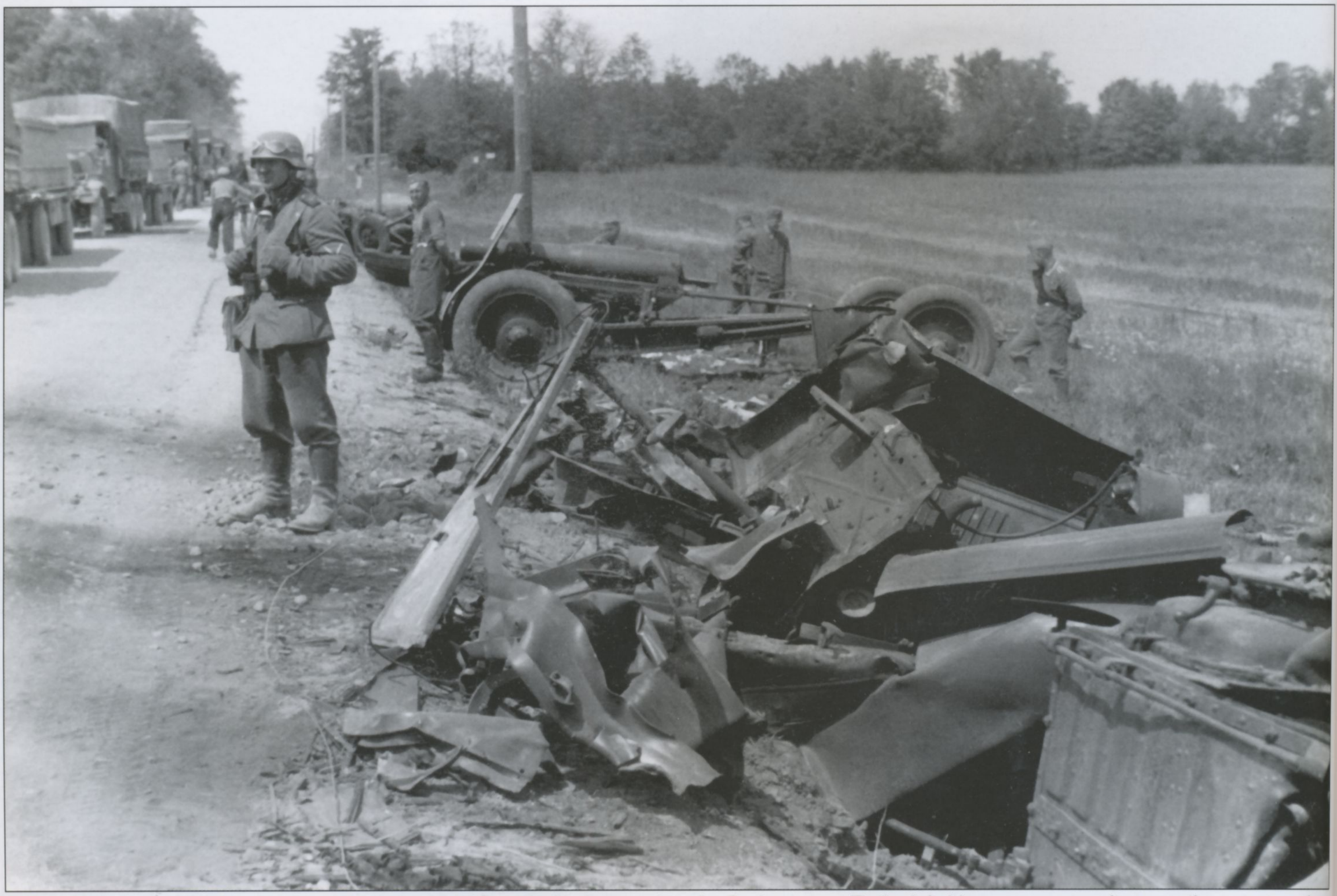


These Germans are very curious about a disabled BA-6 5-ton armored car. The chassis was based on a 4x6 Ford truck, it mounted the same 45mm gun as the T-26 plus two machine guns.

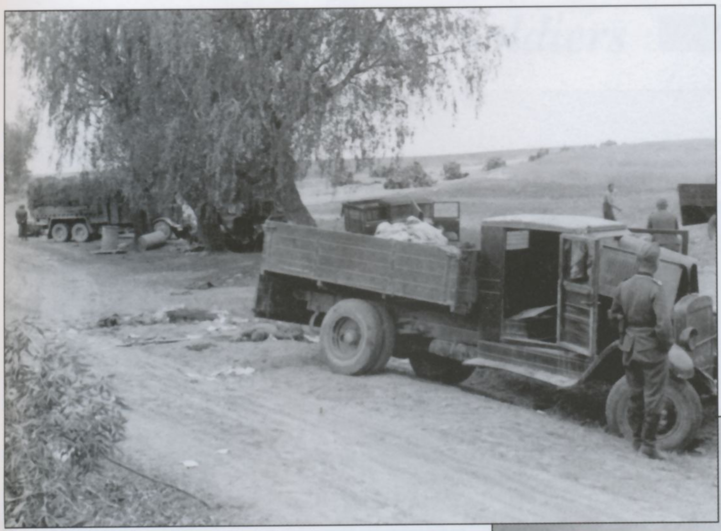




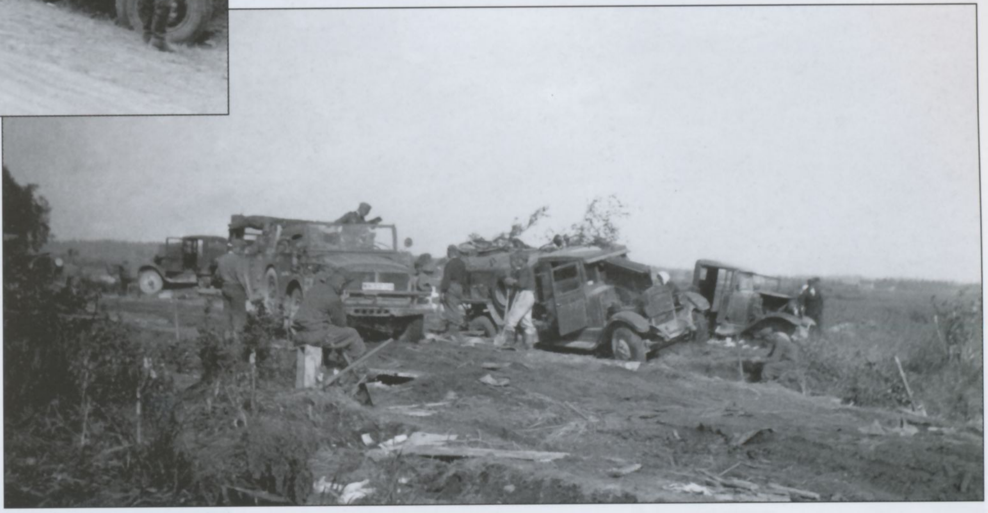
A lightweight STZ-3 Komsomolec artillery prime mover. It had a bow machine gun and seats for the artillery crew.



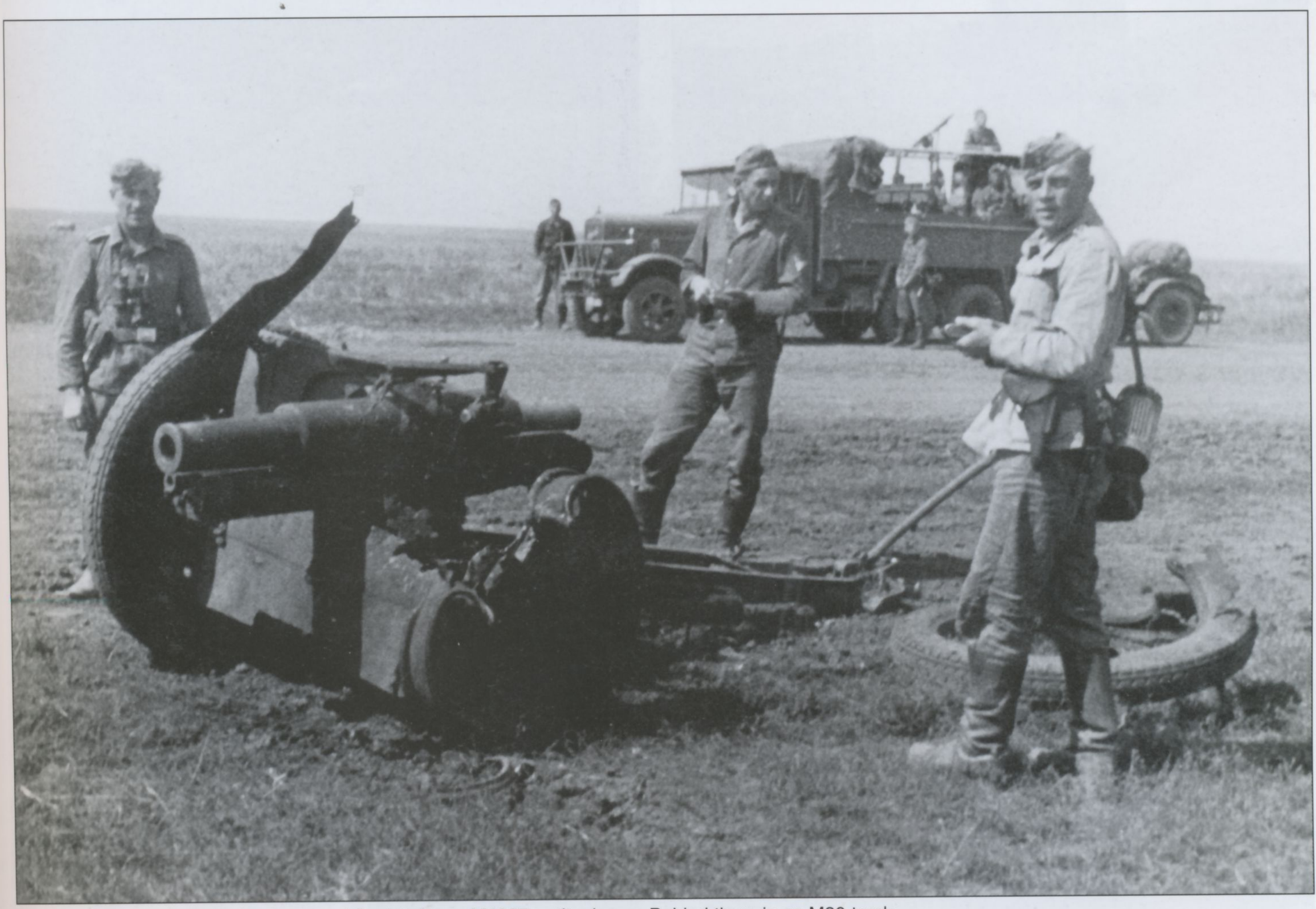
A *Gefreiter* wearing goggles stands next to a roadside littered with the remains of a Soviet convoy. To the left, his own convoy waits to continue eastward.



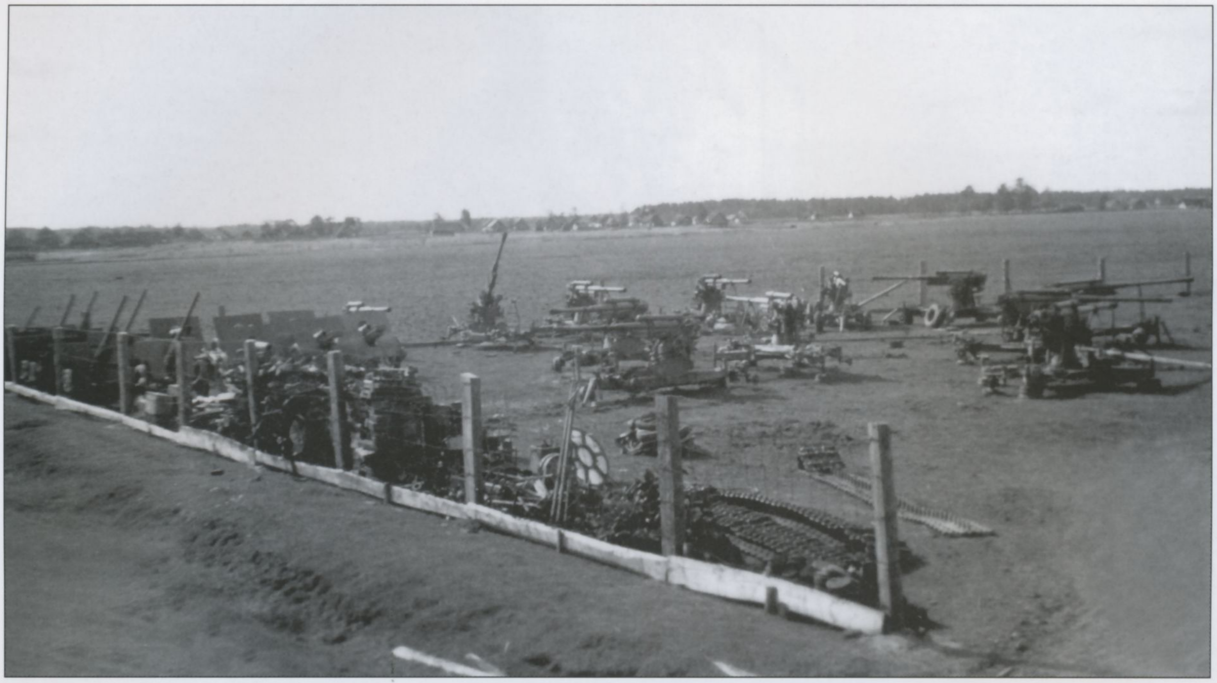
Destroyed Soviet vehicle convoy stretches to the horizon.



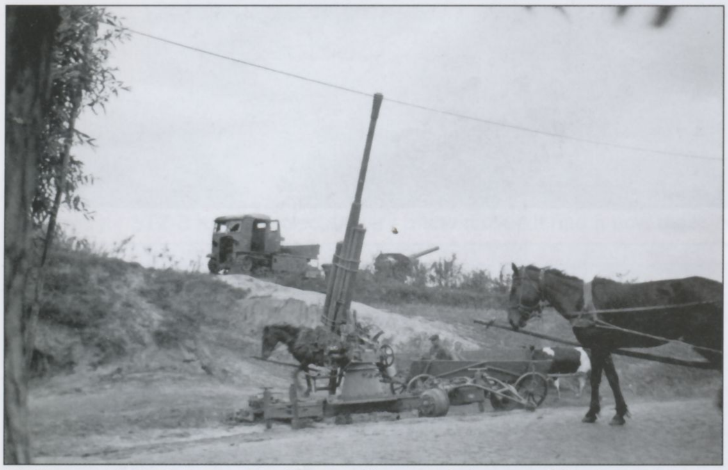
Destroyed Red Army vehicles shoved off the road to make way for German traffic.



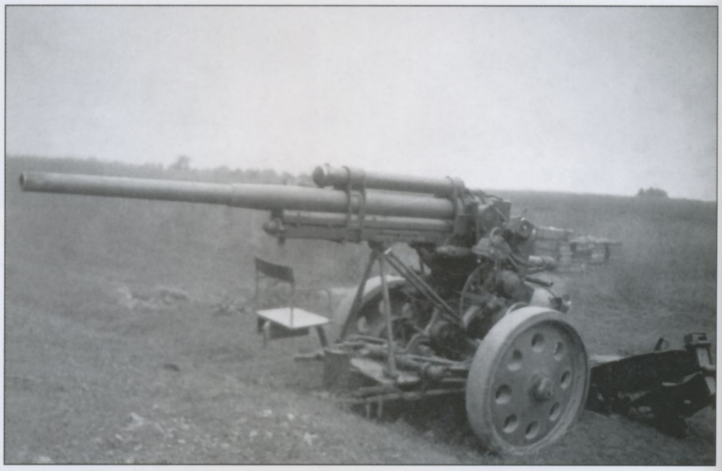
Germans inspect remains of a destroyed Soviet 45mm M1937 antitank gun. Behind them is an M30 truck.



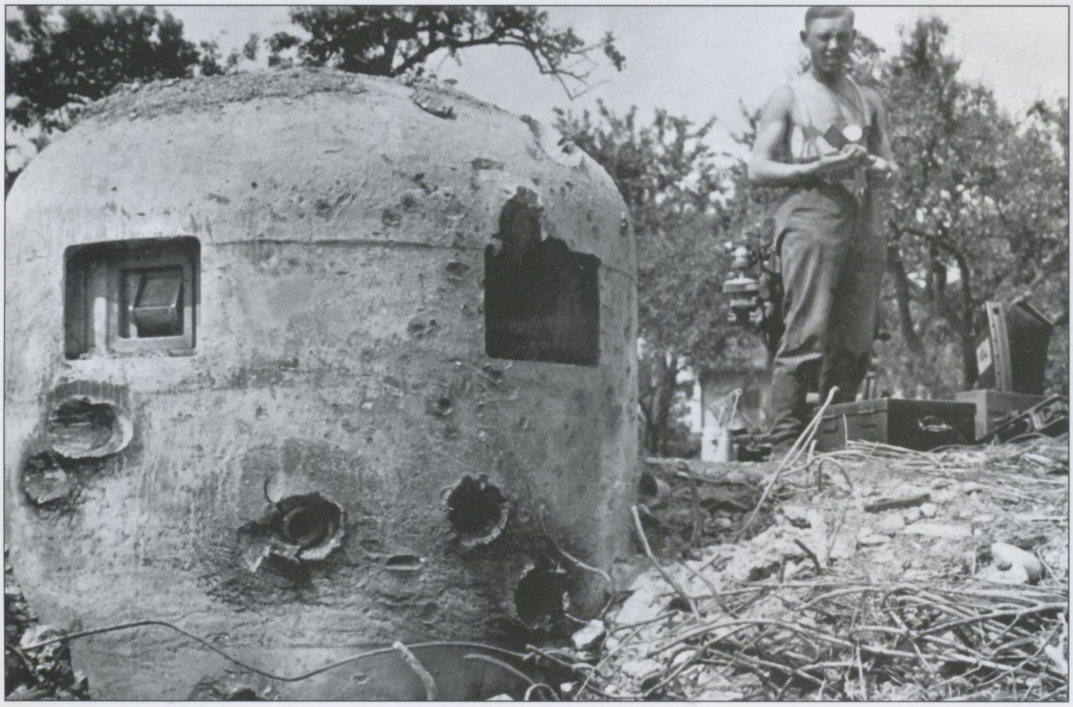
A collection of various pieces of Red Army equipment from antiaircraft guns to caterpillar tracks.



Civilians with their horses and cow mill around destroyed Soviet ordnance. Pointed skyward is an 85mm M1939 antiaircraft gun. Behind it is a 122mm M1938 howitzer and its prime mover.

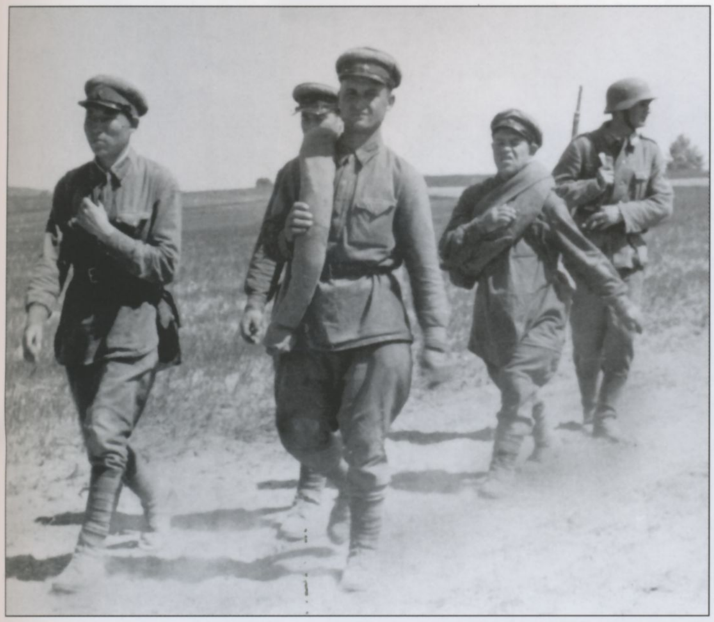


A 76mm M1938 antiaircraft gun, precursor of the M1939. Note lack of muzzle break.

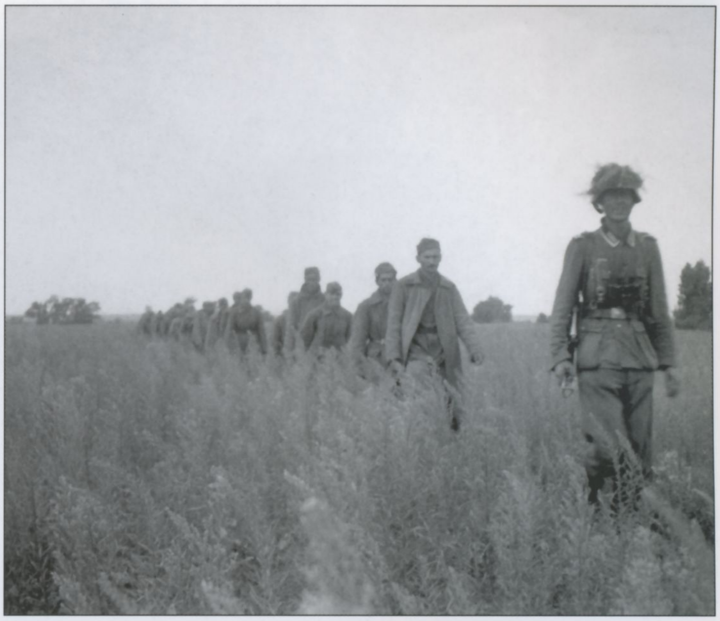


Cupola of a "Stalin Line" bunker, probably for observation or to house a machine gun. This example has taken numerous large caliber hits without losing its integrity, although any crewmen inside were doubtless shook up when the German rounds hit.

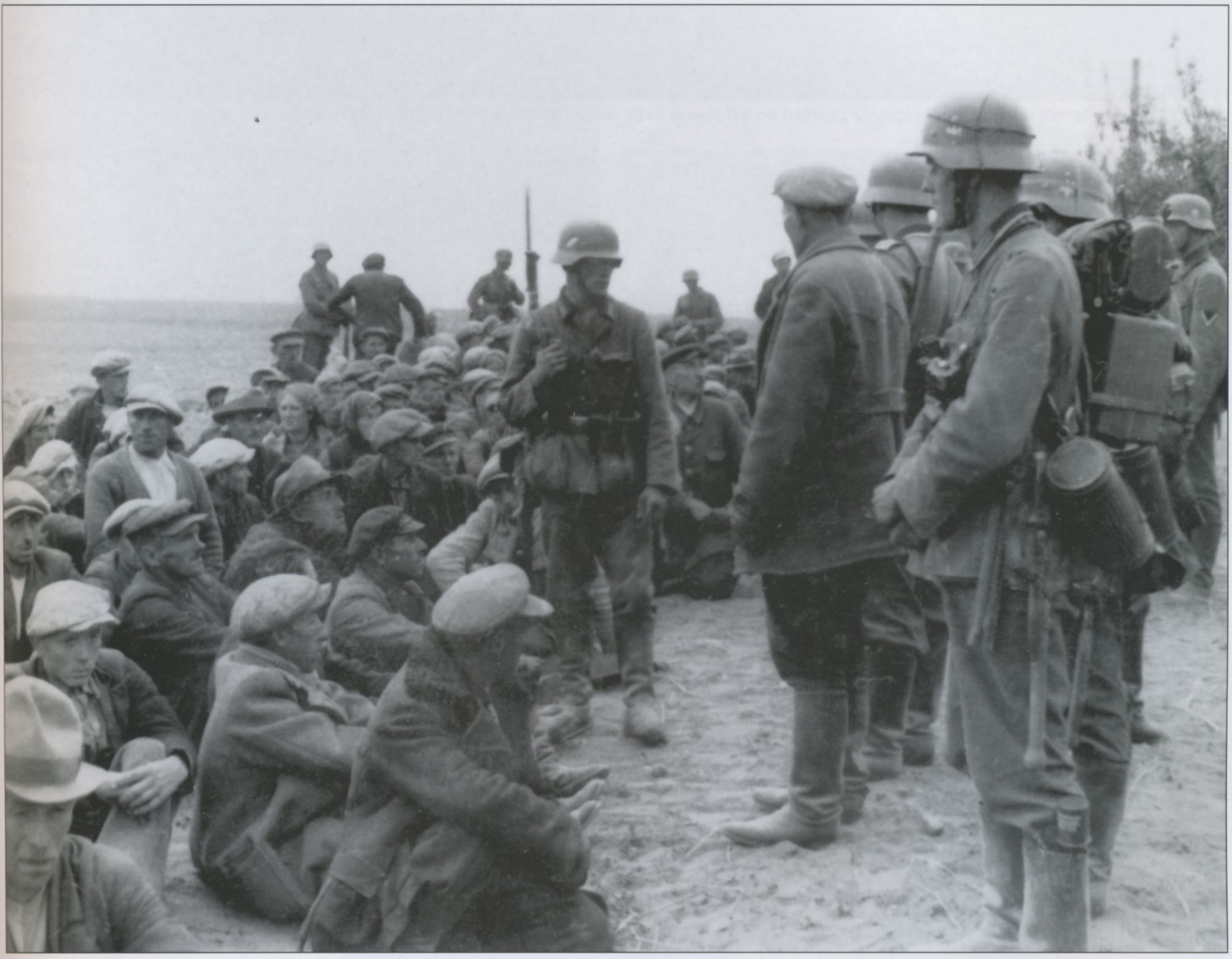
Captured Red Army Soldiers



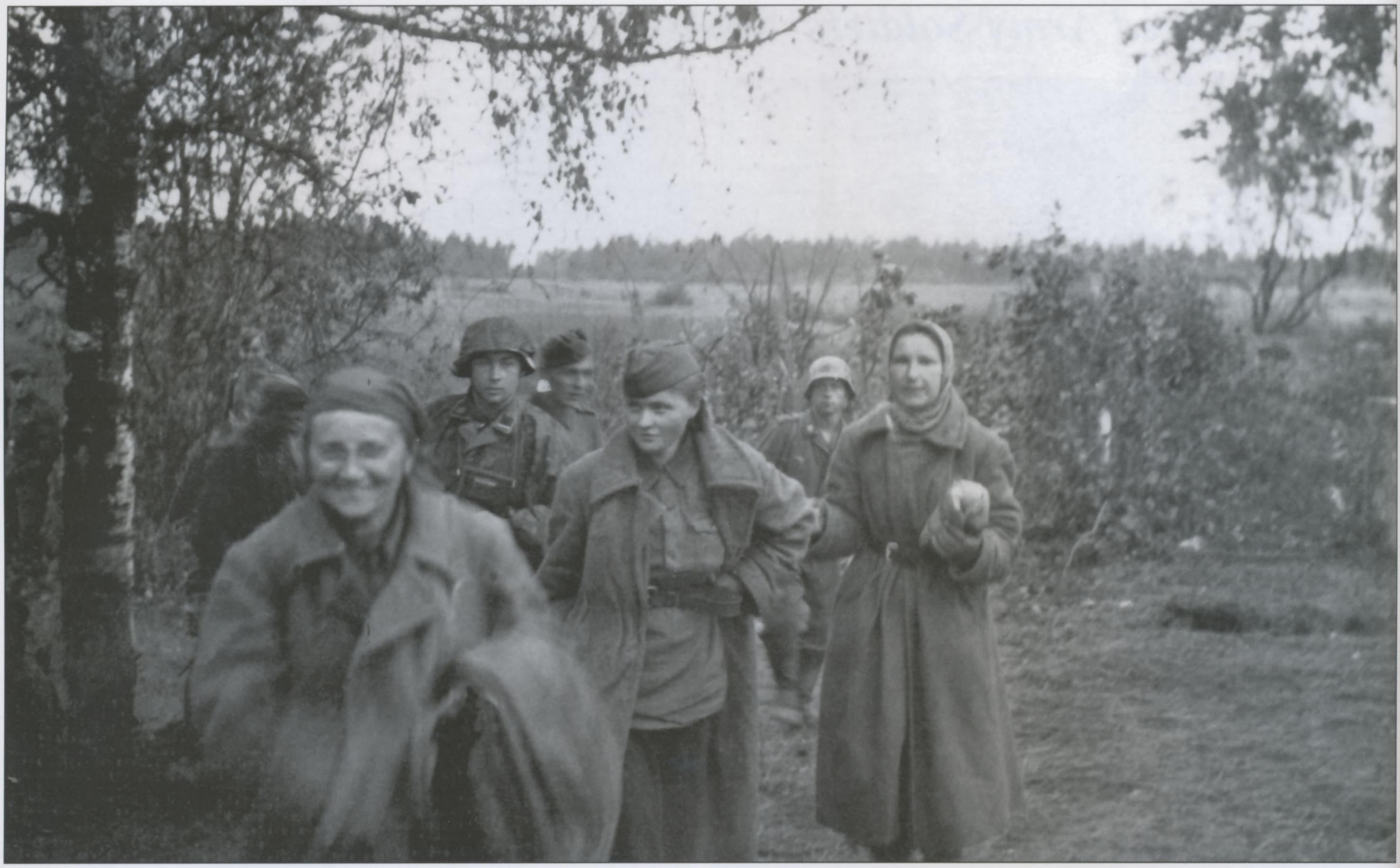
Four POWs escorted by a German. Photos like this, with an Asian man (front) and a short man (rear) piqued the Germans' curiosity and reinforced their racial stereotypes and prejudices.



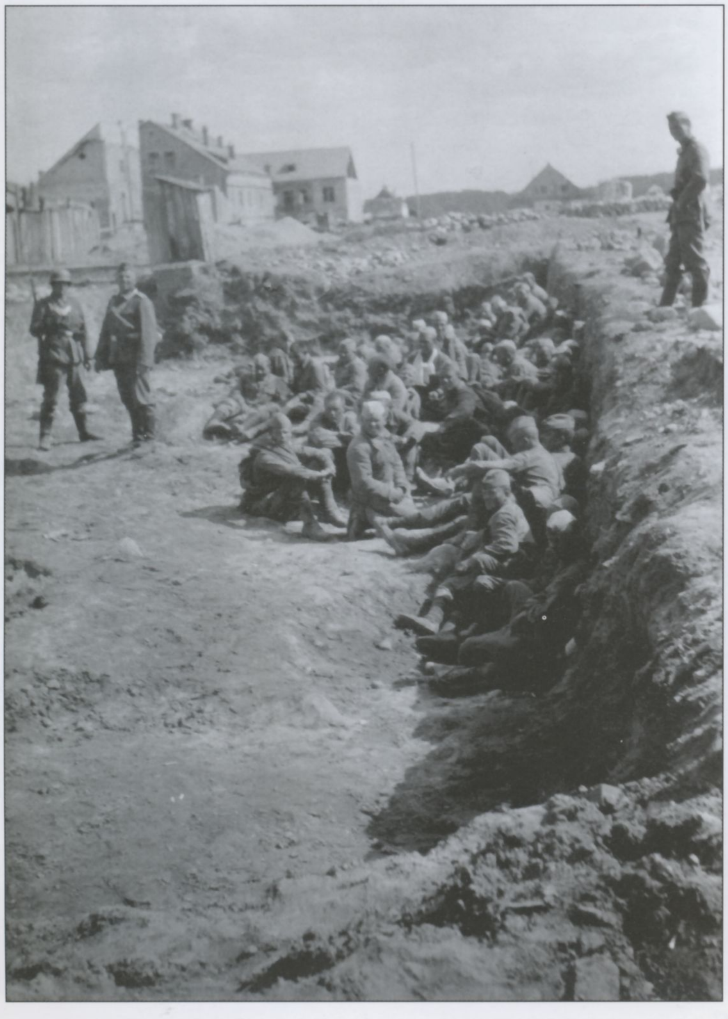
German NCO armed with a machine pistol leads a column of POWs.

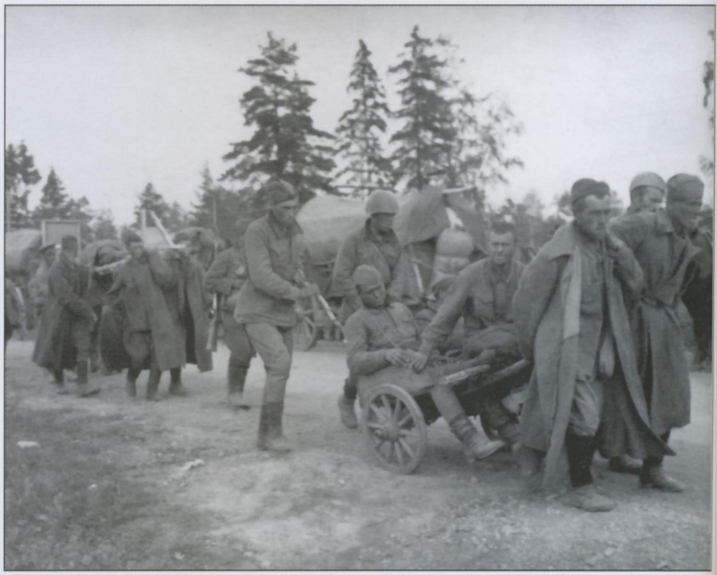


Germans guarding a group of civilians. Since most of these Russians are men they may be suspected partisans (although there were plenty of female partisans).



Some Red Army female soldiers enter captivity. German on left seems to be an SS soldier with distinctive cloth camouflage helmet cover.

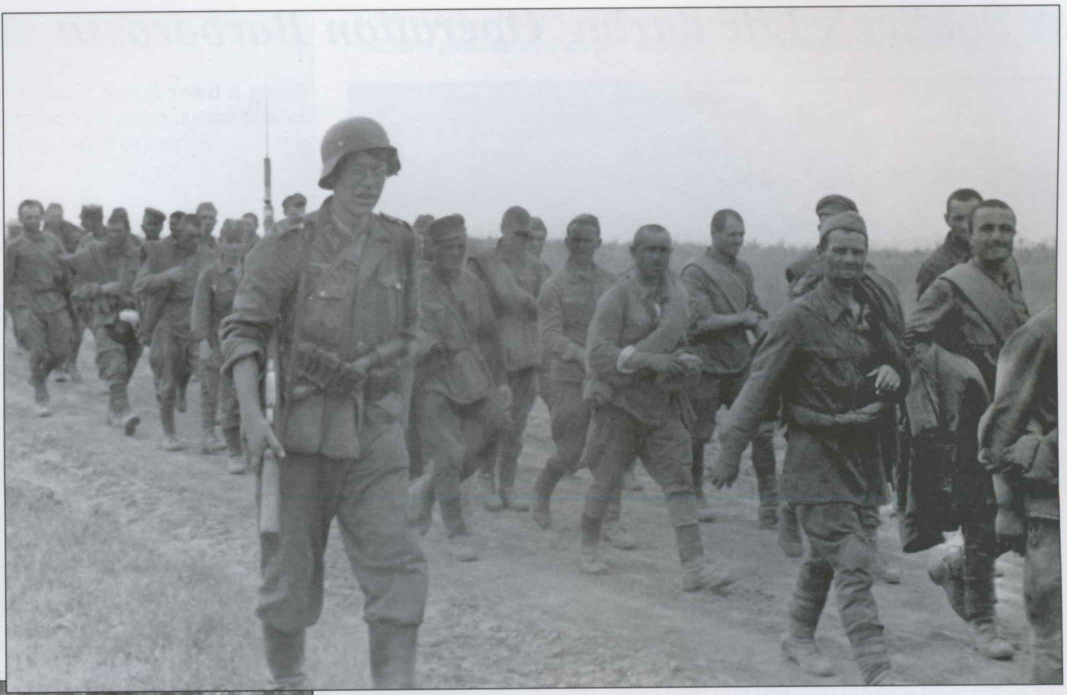


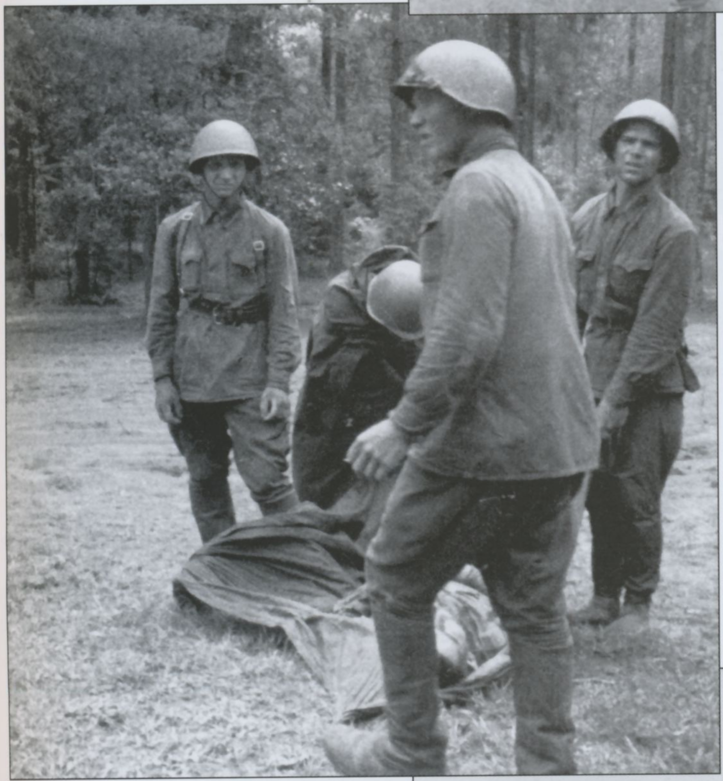


These Soviet POWs are making the best of a terrible situation. They are gallantly trying to save their wounded (center and left), but the chances that they or any of their comrades will survive the first year of German captivity are extremely slim.

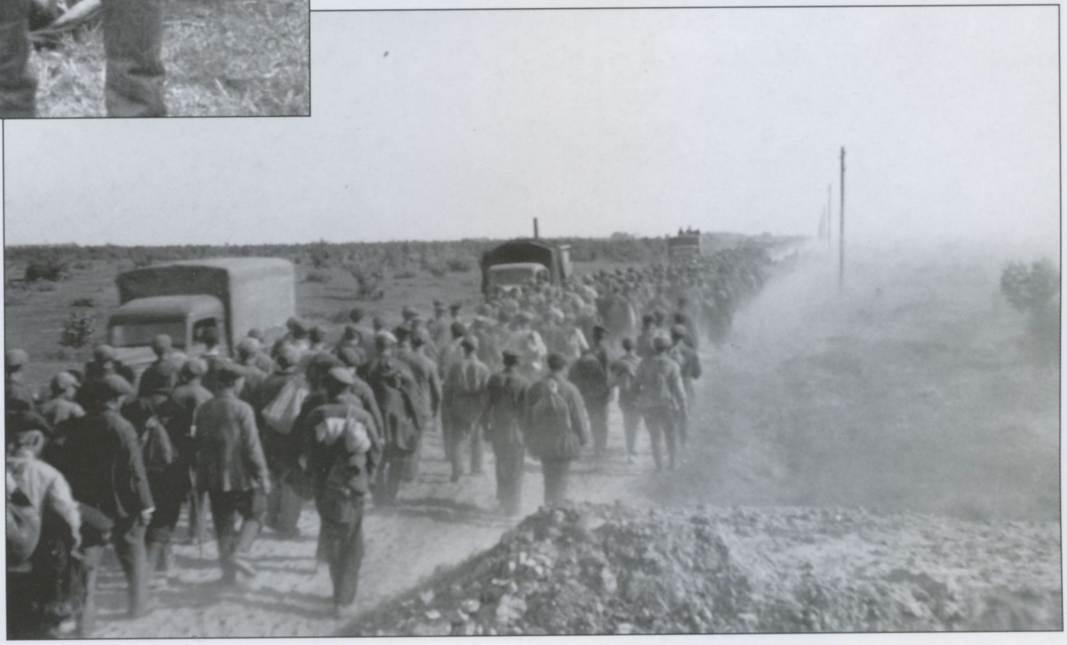
A group of Soviet POWs guarded in a ditch. German on far left is member of the *Feldgendarmerie* (military police) as evidenced by the *Ringkragen* (gorget) visible around his neck.

A weary German marches a column of Red Army soldiers to the rear.



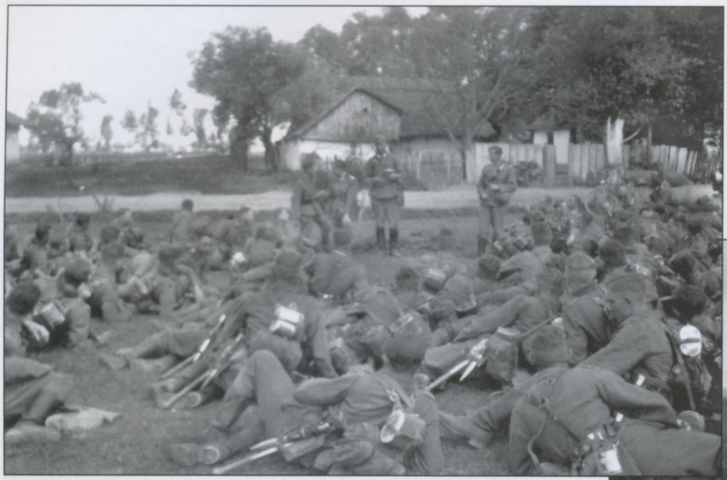


Four POWs struggle to carry one of their wounded on a makeshift stretcher.

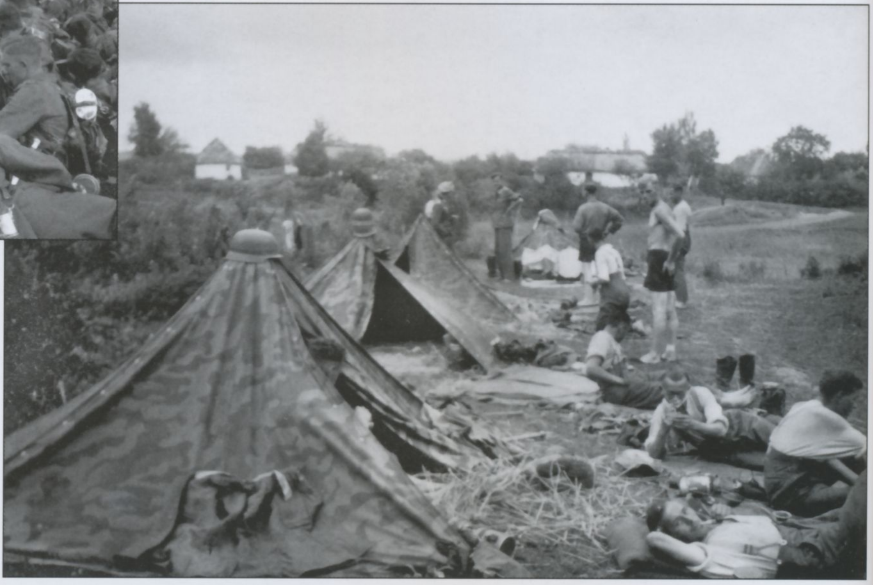


A dusty column of Soviet POWs, including many civilians, probably marching to the west as Germans advance eastward.

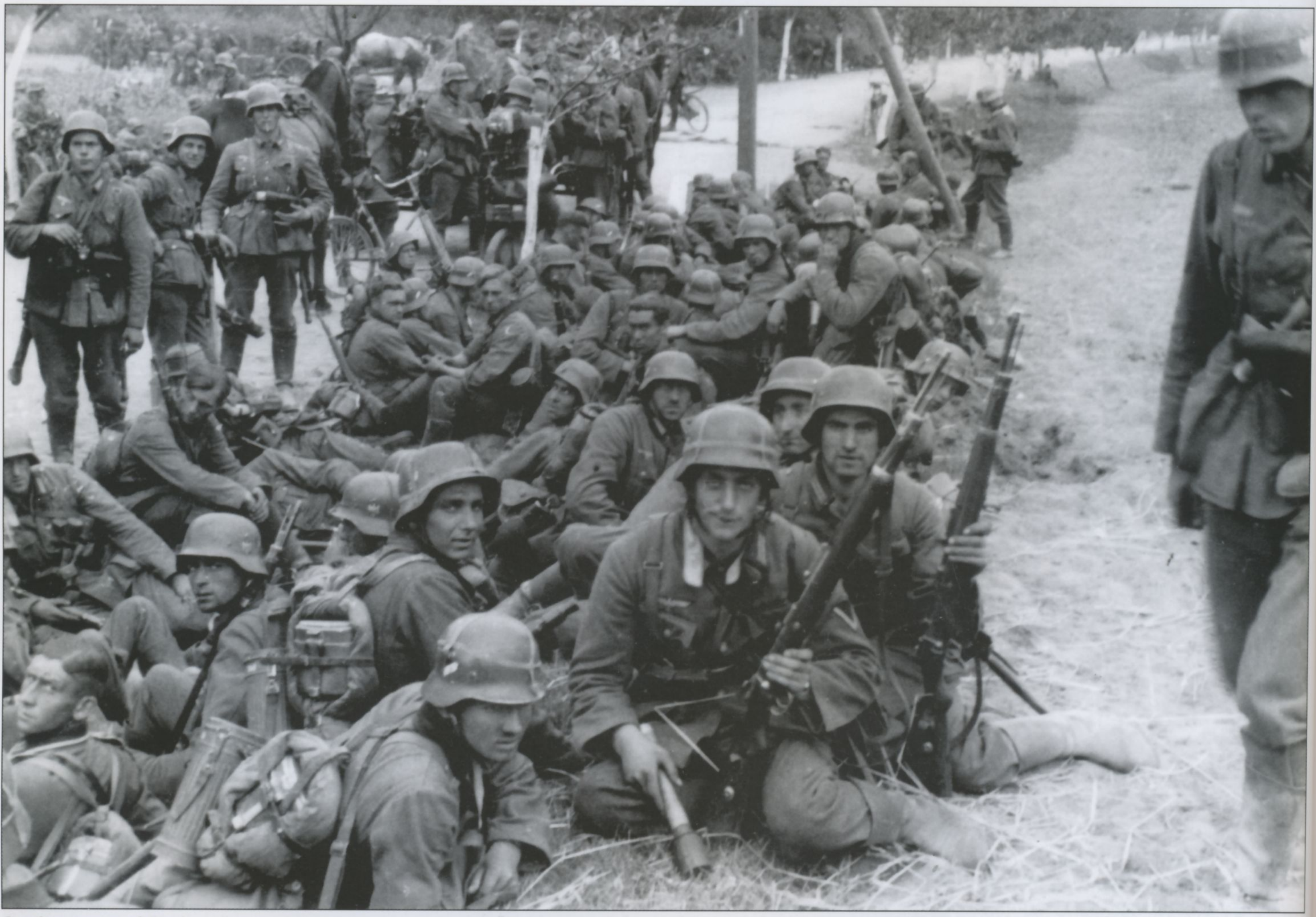
A Soldier's Life during Operation Barbarossa



Taking a break during a long road march. These men carry only their light assault packs, many a cooking pot are worn down to bare metal after hard use. Also visible are hob-nailed boots, entrenching tools and knives.



Non-mechanized formations routinely marched up to 20 miles per day for days on end, trying to keep up with the Panzer spearheads. Periodically they were allowed to take a day of rest to bathe, shave, sew buttons on their uniforms, etc. Here they have also fastened four *Zeltbahn* together to make four-man tents and sleep on a bed of straw.



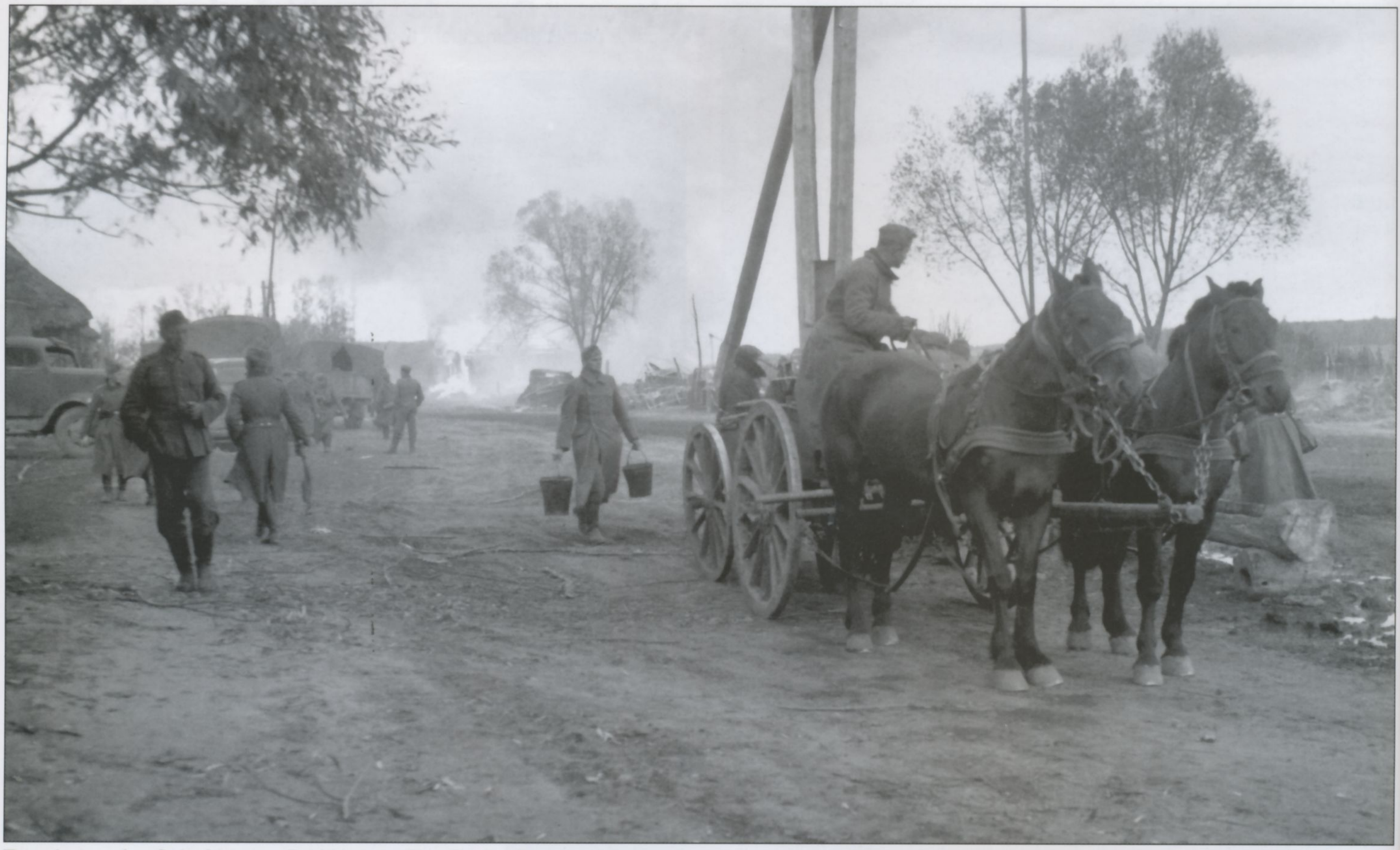
Another group of tired, well-armed and determined-looking Germans rest along the side of a country road.

Another column marching under the hot sun. Two men in foreground carry machine pistols, behind them two men can be seen armed with MG34s.

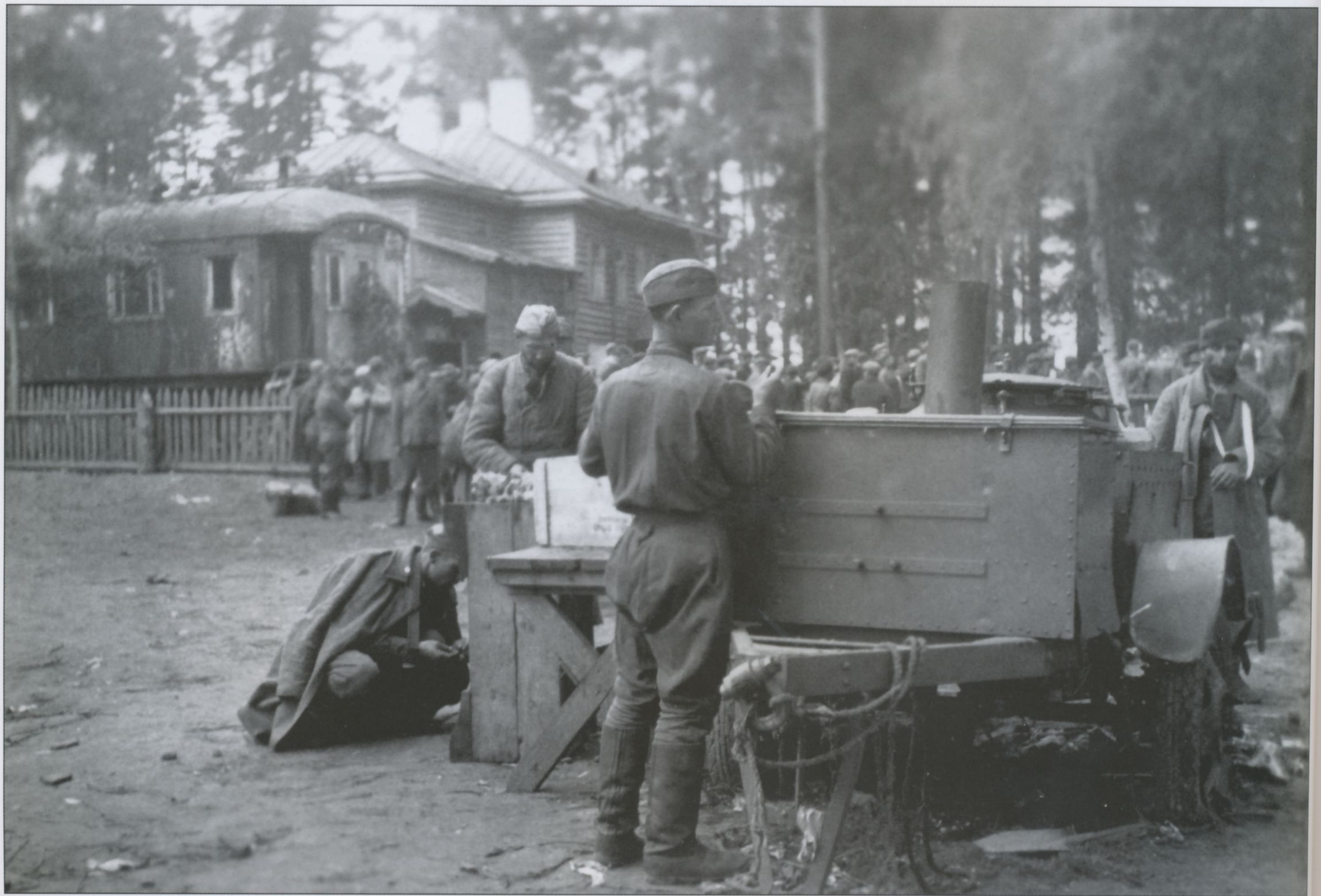
An NCO (left) and two men cooking eggs over a fire. They are wearing netting and other protection against mosquitoes, which were a major problem in Russia's marshy areas during the summer.

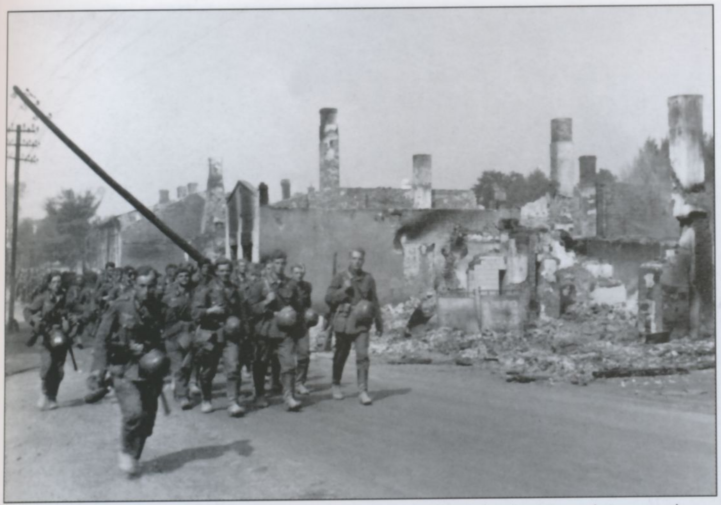
An officer and fairly well-fed and content-looking native family in front of their intact dwelling. Of course the Germans had a very uneven track record when dealing with occupied peoples.

Soldier in leather overcoat with 6x30 binoculars and *Melderkartentasche* foraging for food. German logistics planning and its supply system were woefully inadequate for Barbarossa and they considered foraging a legitimate manner of caring for the fighting force.



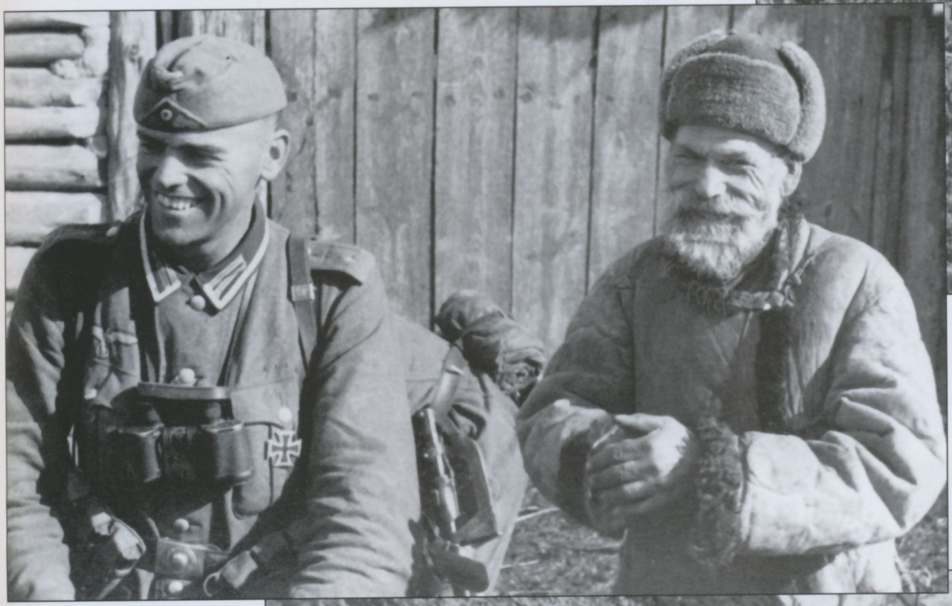
Two photos of a *Gulashkanone* field kitchen. The Fissler Company made the initial design in 1892. These newer versions had a 200l stewpot and 90l coffee pot, enough to serve approximately 120 troops. In lower photo Soviet POWs are preparing food as "volunteers."



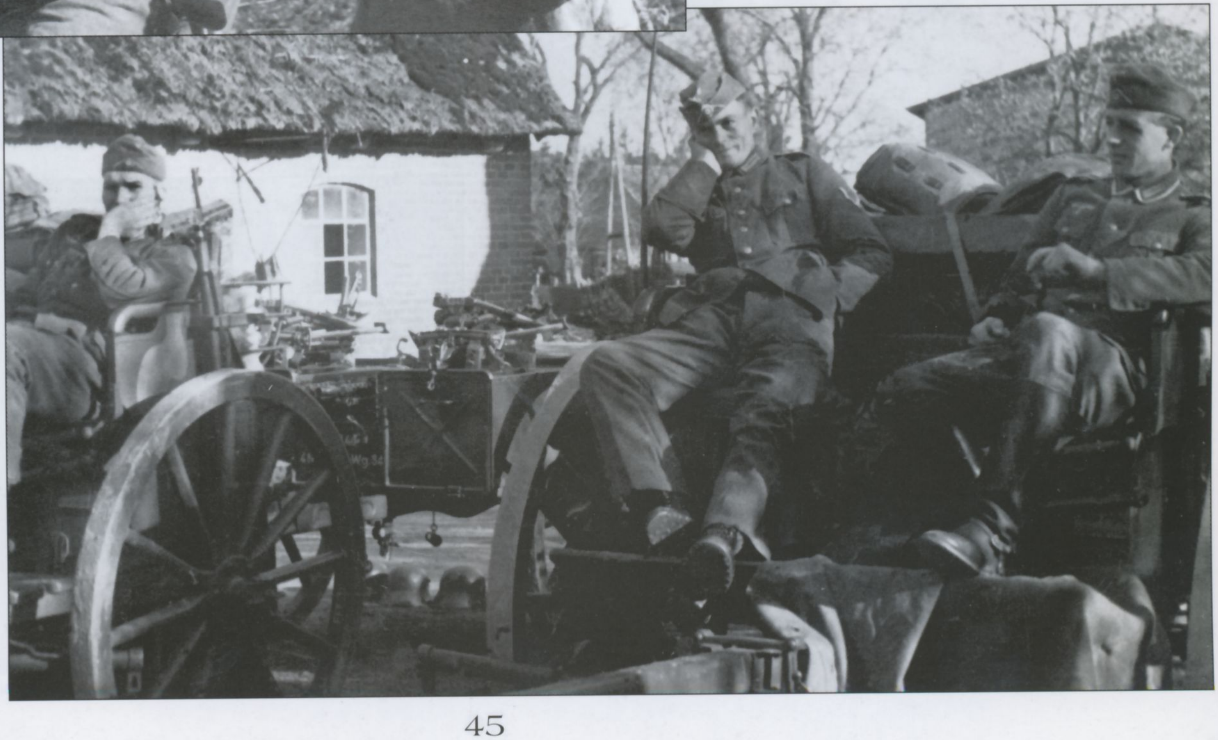


Column of troops march through well-built, but largely destroyed, town where only a few masonry walls and chimneys remain standing.

Making notes in a fighting position.



A *Feldwebel* with Iron Cross 1st Class and a local man seem to be enjoying a light moment.



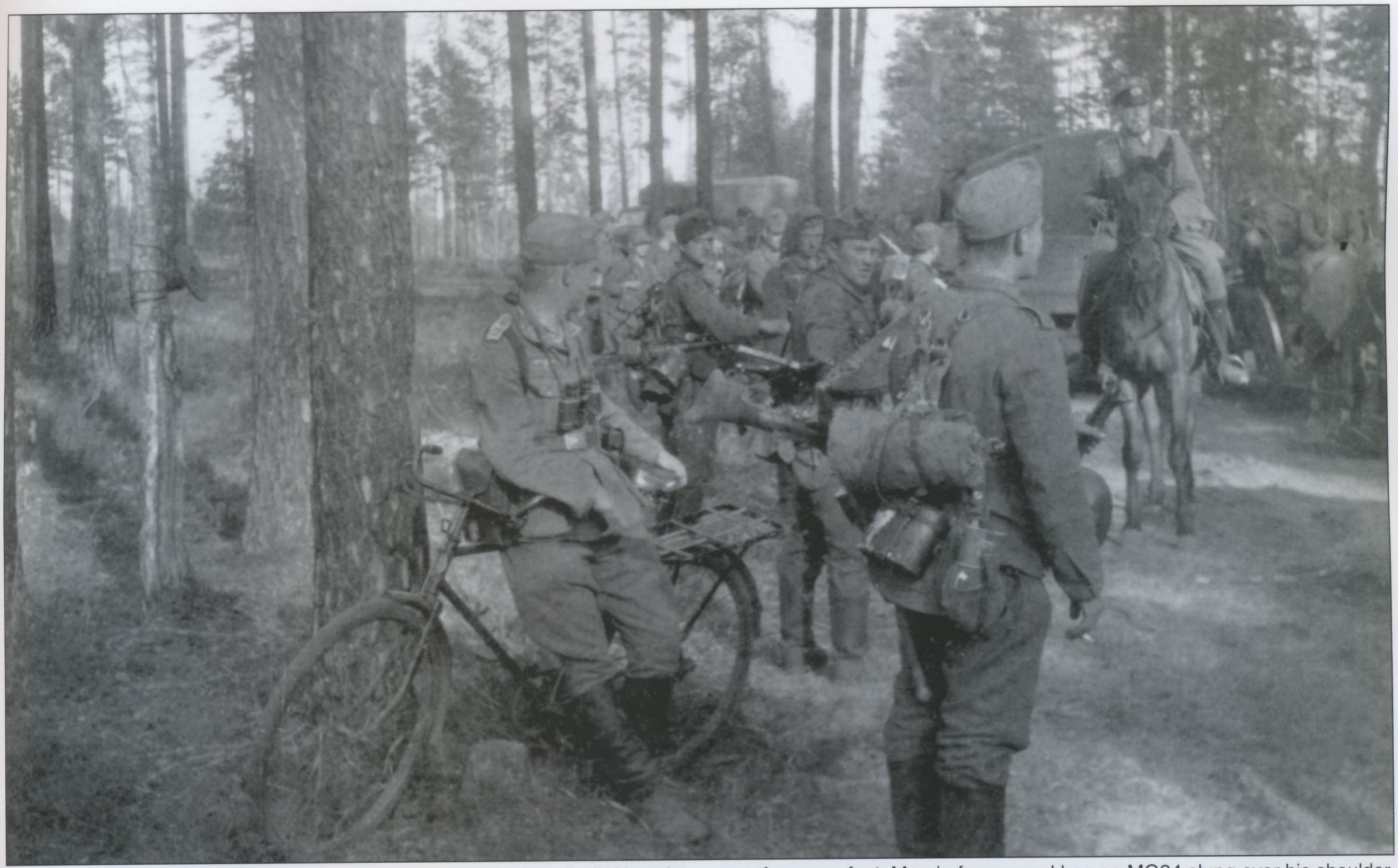
Soldier, *Gefreiter* and NCO relaxing on their wagon carts.

Column of troops marching across a large bridge. Man in center of photo has an MG34 on his shoulder.

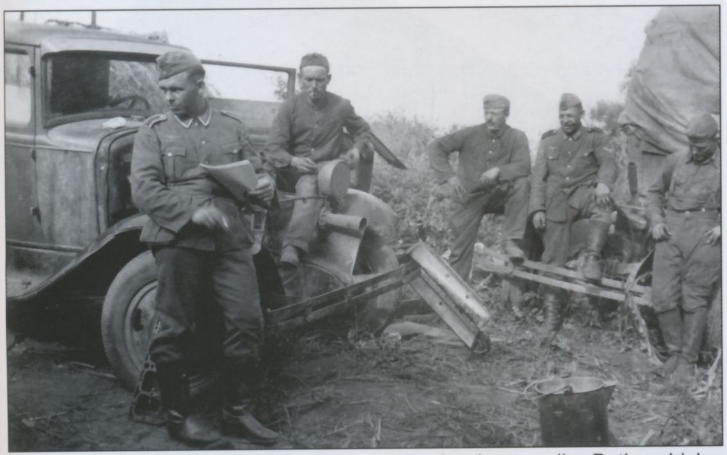
An NCO searches the distance with his 6x30 binoculars. Barely visible is the ribbon to his Iron Cross 2nd Class in the button hole of his tunic.

Two staff cars moving over a bridge in a small town.

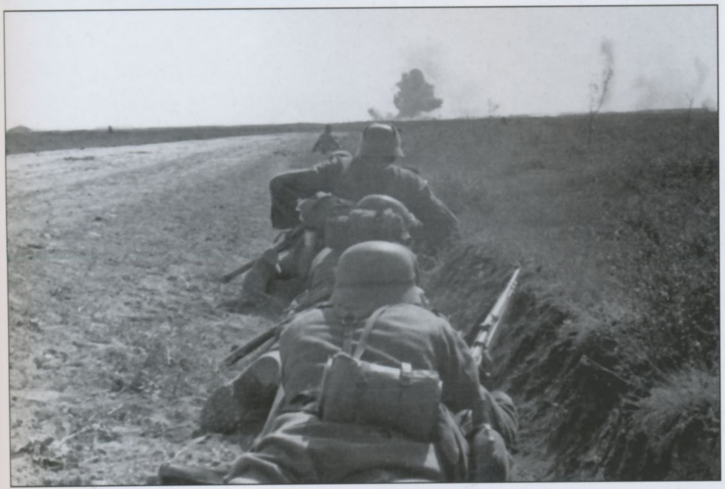
A *Gefreiter* (right) and a truckful of men prepare to take a ride. A *Feldwebel* (far right) sees them off while man on left wears two canteens against the scorching Russian summer.



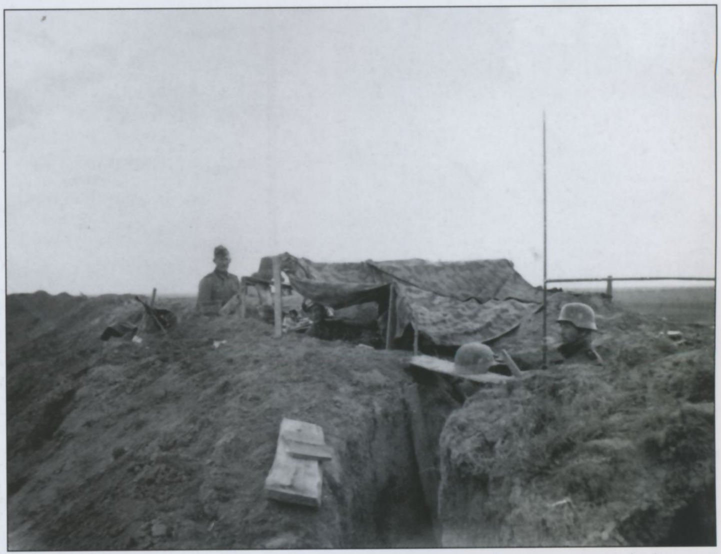
Officer on horse (right) and senior NCO leaning against a bicycle (left) and a group of men on foot. Man in foreground has an MG34 slung over his shoulder.



NCO (left) and *Gefreiter* and some mechanics in overalls. Both vehicles appear to be worse for wear.



Soldiers take cover along side a road while artillery explodes on the horizon.



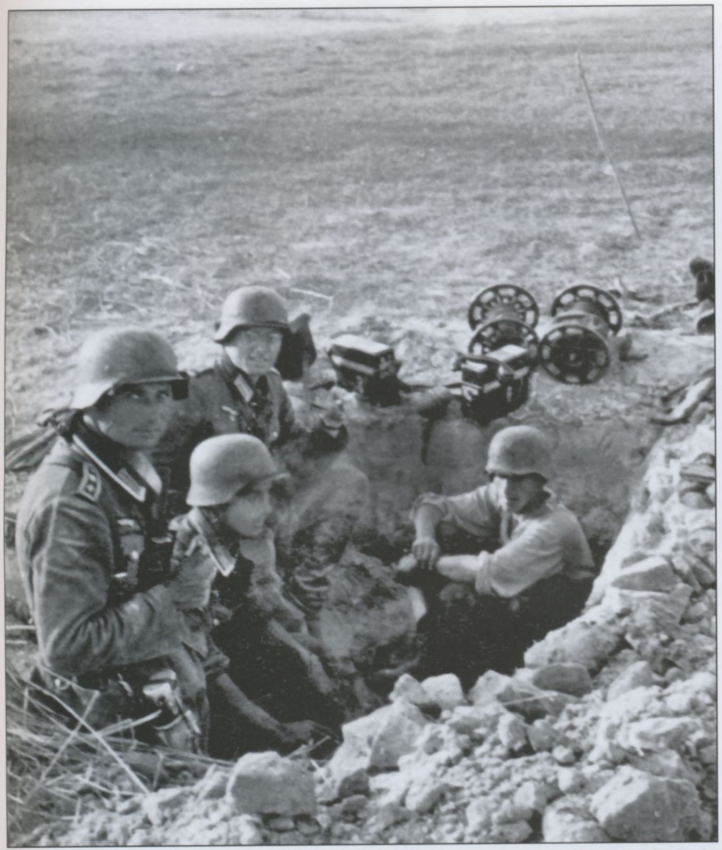
Evidently occupying defensive trenches, these men have made a shelter out of their *Zeltbahn*.

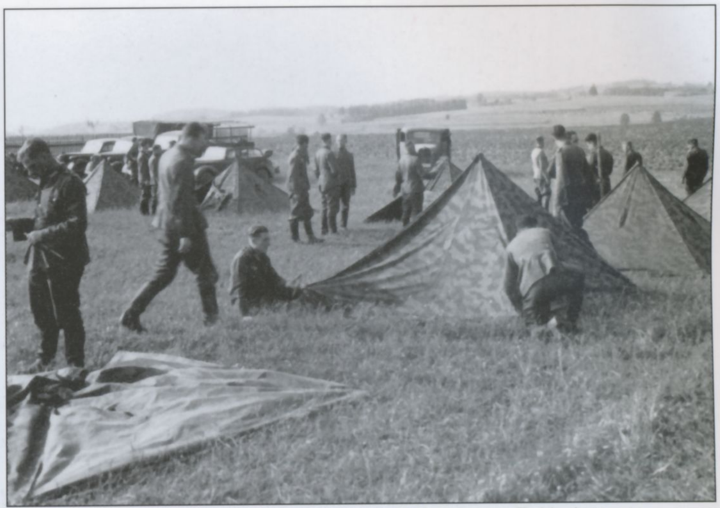
German soldiers march across a railroad bridge while some native men look on. The retreating Red Army failed to destroy many such bridges, which the Germans often captured intact and used to keep their Panzer advancing.

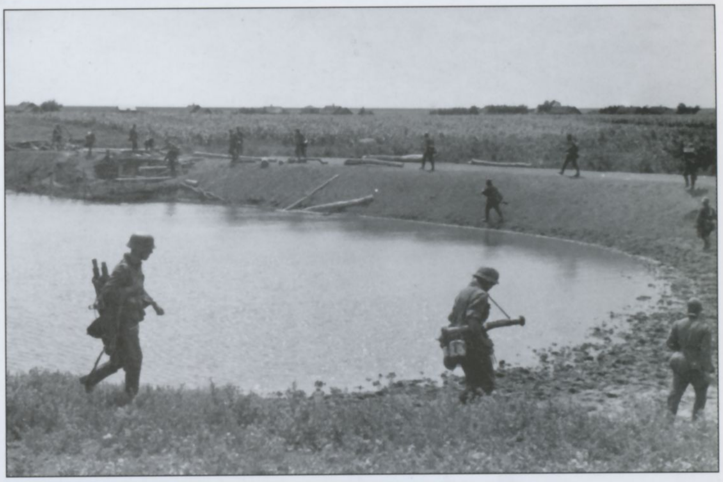
A medic (left) and *Gefreiter* (right) take a break in a Russian field.

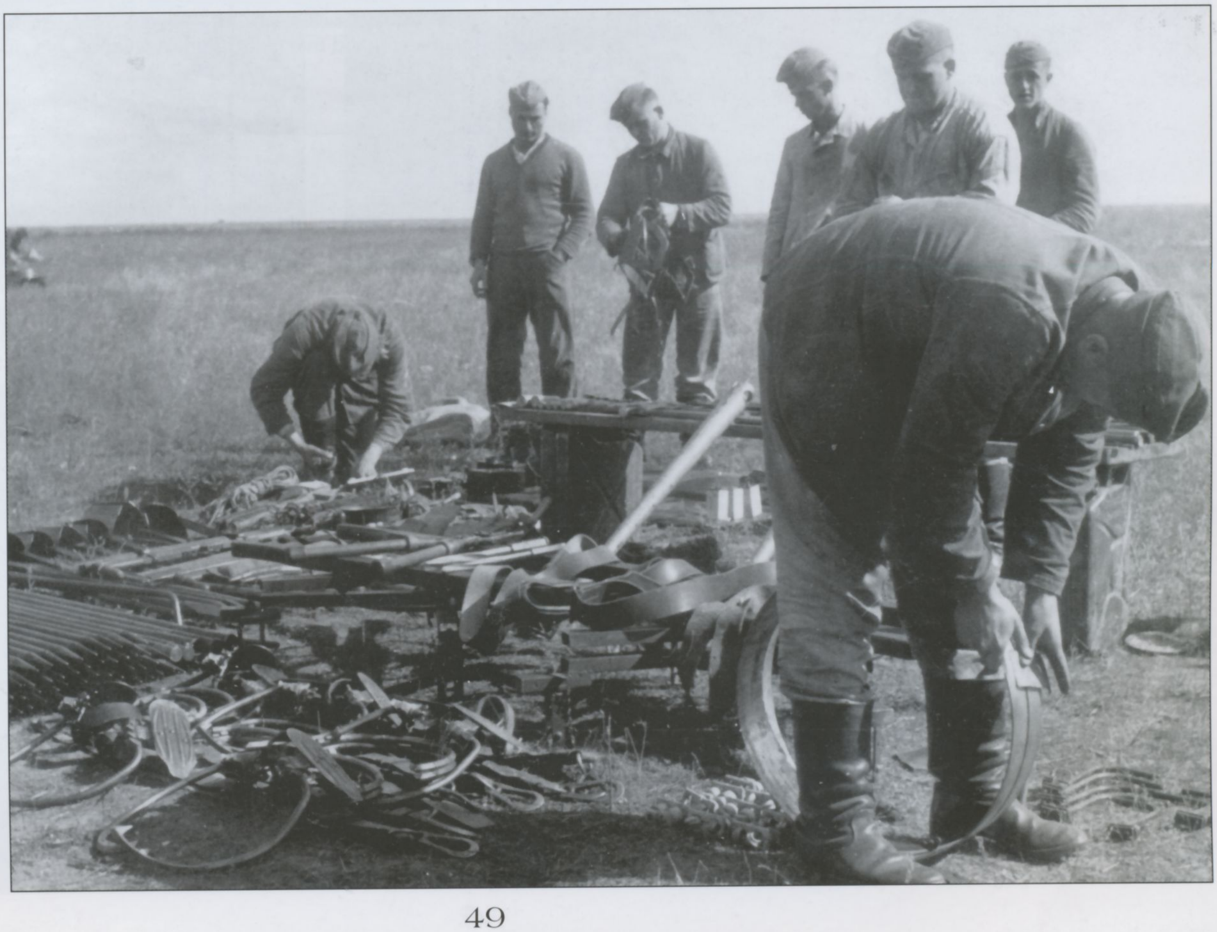
Two exhausted soldiers take a nap, half-covered by a *Zeltbahn*.

A soldier and *Obergefreiter* (right) try to make their way in the infamous Russian mud.


A *Hauptfeldwebel* and a small group of soldiers in a hastily dug foxhole cluttered with ammo cans and communication wire spools.


A vehicle convoy halts and men make their four-man *Zeltbahn* tents.

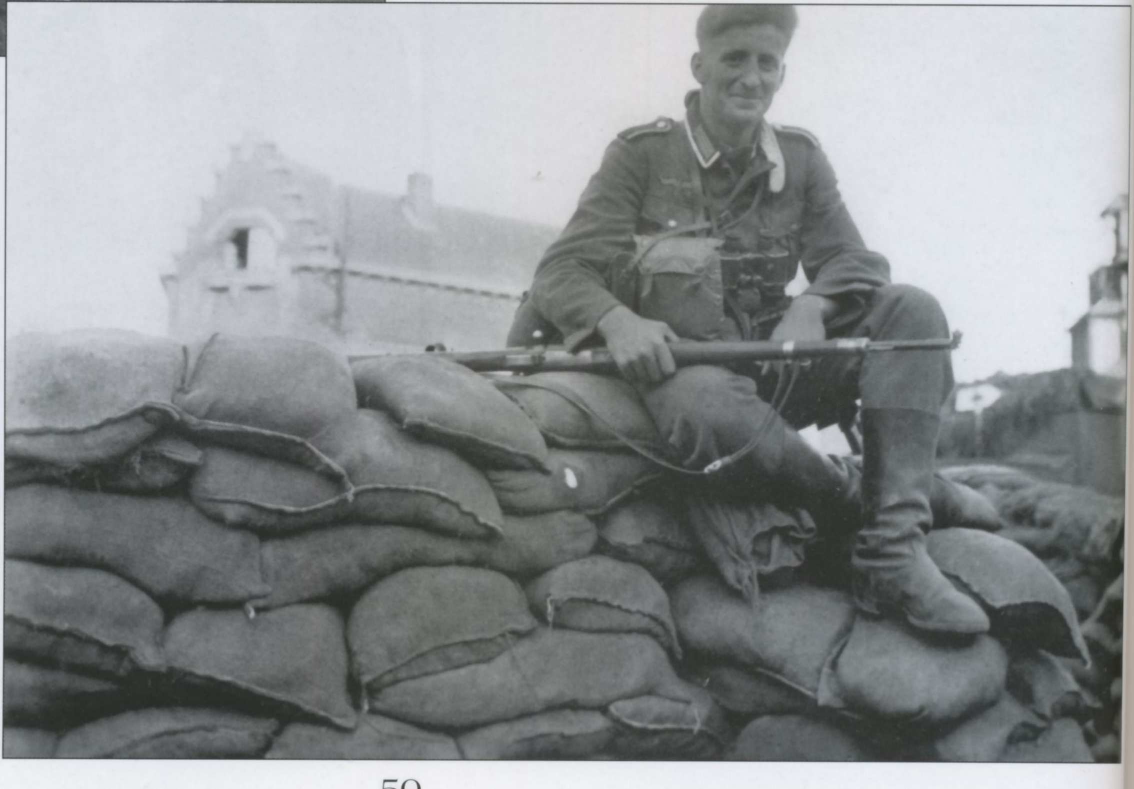

Soldiers march around a small reservoir. Man in right foreground carries an antiaircraft rangefinder.


Inspecting, inventorying or repairing equipment in the middle of nowhere. Man second from left wears non-regulation sweater while two men standing at right wear *Drilliganzug* fatigue uniforms.

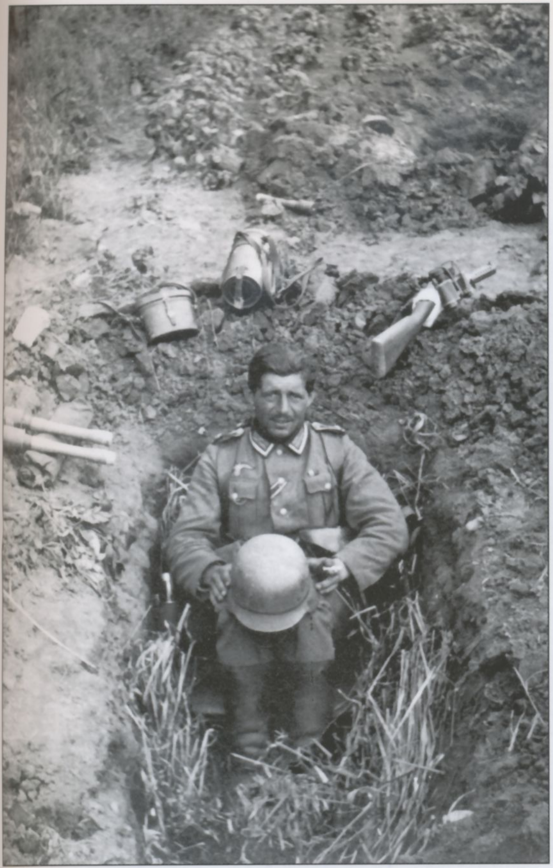
The Germans have set up shelters along side a stout building. Often a field hospital or the headquarters of a large formation would be housed in such a structure.

Cleaning and maintaining one's weapon is a good way to stay alive and kil the enemy.

Perhaps waiting for the enemy to be cleared out to the front.

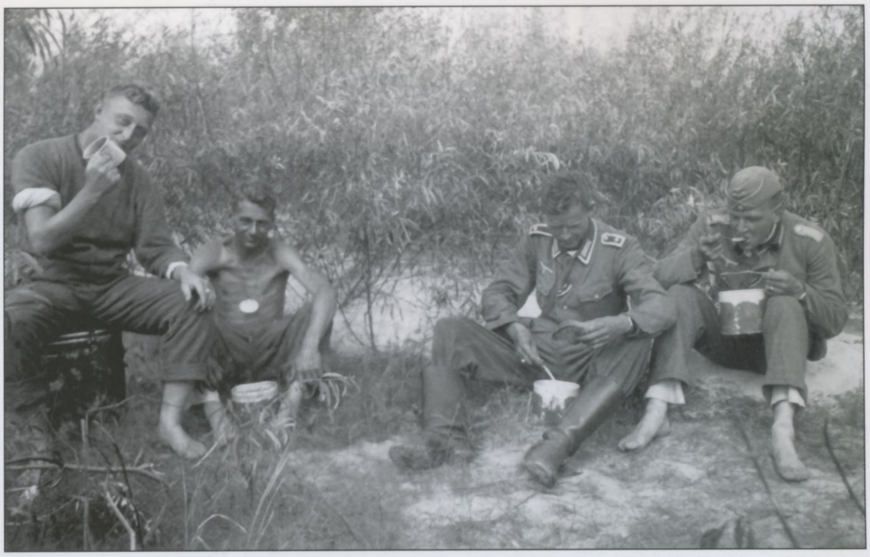


A *Feldwebel* poses on a sandbag wall. He has his trusty Kar98, 6x30 binoculars and *Gasplane* in its carrying case.

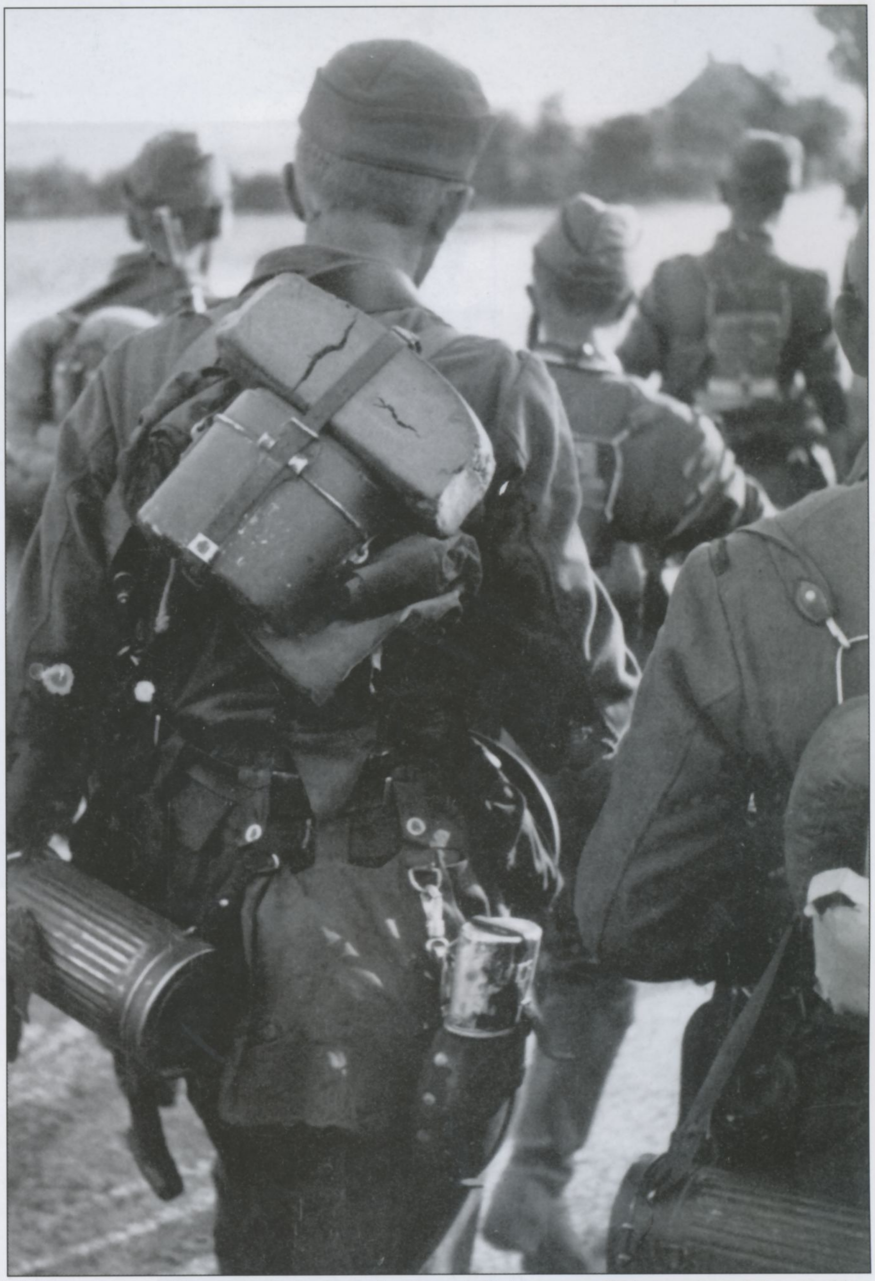


An NCO, recipient of the Iron Class 2nd Class, gets comfortable in his straw-lined foxhole. He is surrounded with the tools of the trade (from left): two stick grenades, binoculars, gas mask carrying canister and an obsolete 9mm MPE rifle.

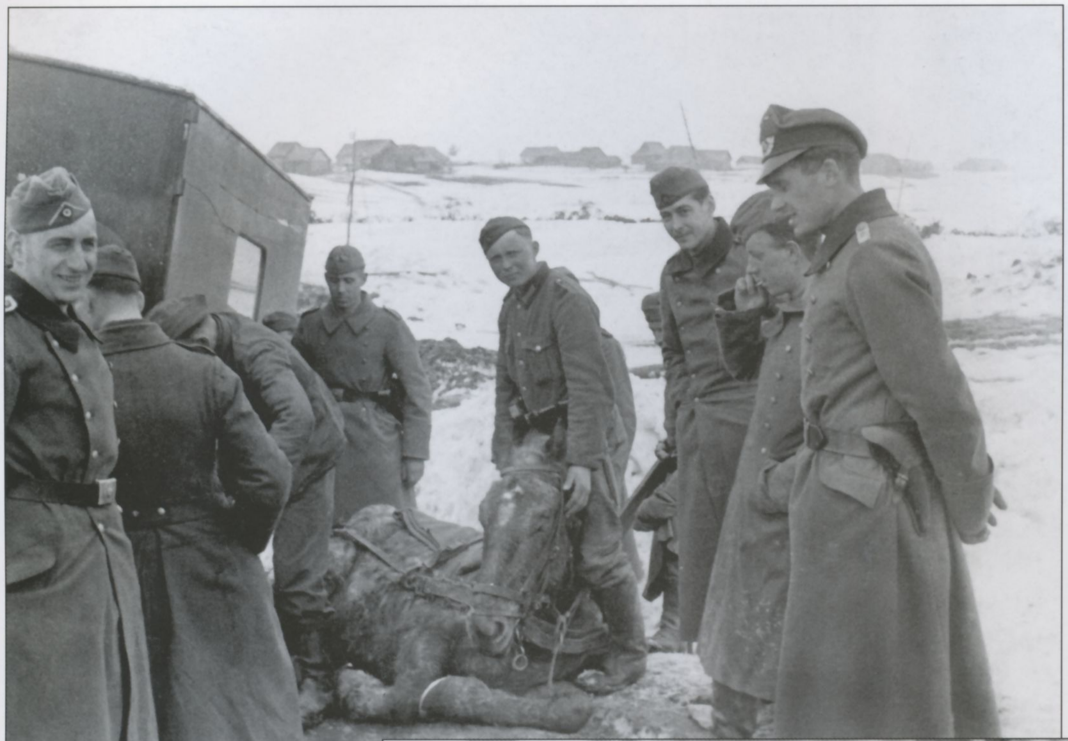
Two men in greatcoats trying to keep warm in a typically dense Russian forest.



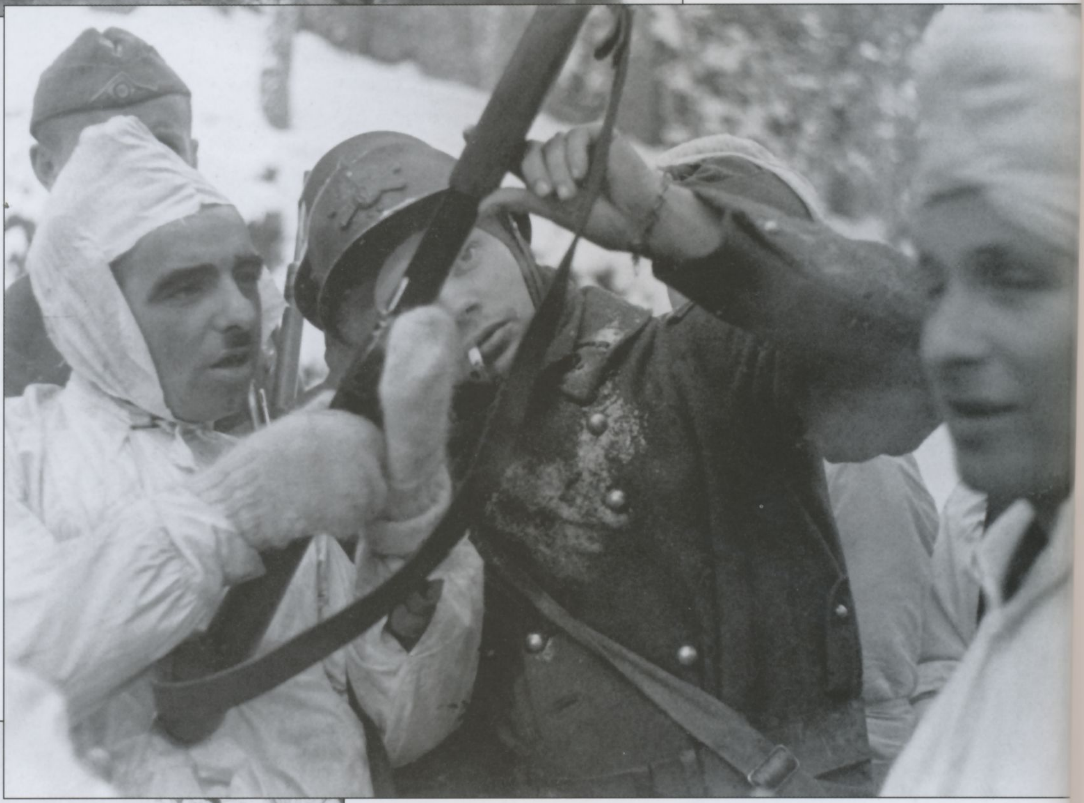
Take a break, get some chow and rest one's feet. A couple of soldiers (left), *Hauptfeldwebel* and *leutnant* (right) take it easy. Identification disc can be seen on shirtless man.



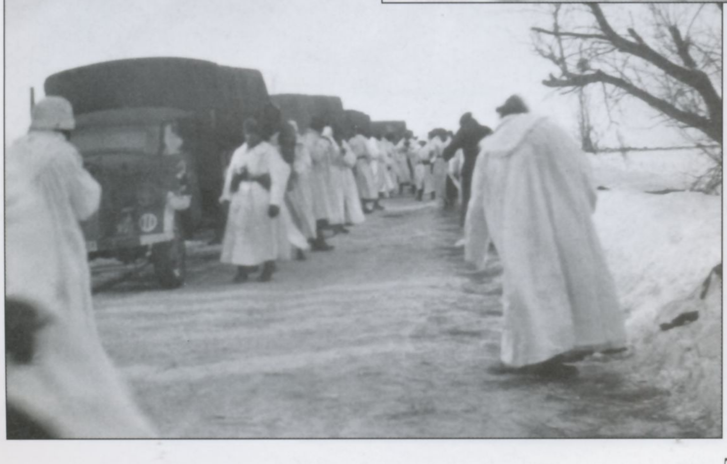
This man's assault pack includes a loaf of bread. Paint worn off his mask canister, cooking pot and canteen cup belie much hard use.



Leutnant (right) and NCO (left) and a group of soldiers and what is probably an exhausted horse (if the horse was dead it is doubtful the men would be smiling). German unit histories are full of tales of their admiration and affection for these hard-working and essential creatures.



Checking a weapon for cleanliness. Some men wear makeshift winter camouflage seemingly made up of little more than bed sheets.



Men in winter camouflage beside their convoy during a halt.

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